

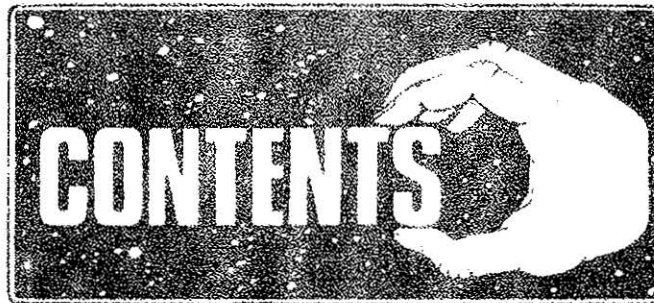
ScoTpres!

ENTERPRISE -



LOG ENTRIES 46

a STAR TREK
fanzine



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A Scotpress Publication.

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Enterprise Log Entries 46, price £1.15 within the U.K., is put out by Scotpress and is available from

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6 Craigmill Cottages
Strathmartine
by Dundee,
Scotland.

Foreign rates - addressed envelope and 2 IRC's for details.

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December 1981 350 copies.

Scotpress - Sheila Clark, Valerie Piacentini, Janet Quarton and Shona.

Hello, and welcome to Enterprise Log Entries 46.

Sheila, Janet and I would like to thank all those of you who wrote wishing us good luck with ScoTpress. We very much appreciate your good wishes, and we will continue to try and put out the type of zine you have let us know you'd like to read.

One of the letters asked us why ScoTpress, and why it is written with the capital T in the middle.

Well, we all live in Scotland, and so thought it would be nice to have a Scottish connection to our name; and the ST in our name stands, of course, for Star Trek - without which none of us would be here. We are, and will remain, Star Trek fans above all else, and our zines will reflect that interest.

If there are any questions you'd like to ask, or points you would like to raise, please contact either Sheila or me, and we'll try to answer them here; where necessary, we can contact the writer of a story to clear up a point. So, if you've ever wondered, "Why did...?" or, "What happened to...?", perhaps we can find the answer for you.

As always, we would be very pleased to receive submission of stories, poetry, or artwork. New contributors are just as much the lifeblood of fandom as established favourites, and zines can only continue as long as contributions keep coming in.

Next issue, I hope to have some news for you of a project we have been working on for a while now. In the meantime, I hope you enjoy this issue of Enterprise Log Entries.



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THE MISSING HOURS by Vicki Richards

As soon as the transporter hum faded and died out, Spock knew something was wrong.

He knew it even before Kirk jumped from the platform and demanded in a snarling tone why he hadn't saluted. For a split-second of inaction, so small that no-one else, except perhaps Jim Kirk, could have noticed, Spock stood immobile, staring disbelievingly at his Captain and the rest of the landing party; but especially at the Captain, whose strange behaviour was making the Vulcan uncharacteristically confused.

Confused? No... it was more than that. In that moment a question formed itself in Spock's mind, a question on the surface so illogical that he wondered how he could have asked himself such a thing.

His whole subconscious asked, //Where is Jim?//

Where was Jim? But Jim was standing right in front of him, accusing him of crimes ranging from insubordination to mutiny. And then Spock really looked at the Captain James T. Kirk who stood in front of him, an expression of barely-concealed cruelty on his face that hid only minimally the malicious thoughts within.

For an instant Spock thought that the same malfunction had occurred that once before had split his friend into the two sides of his personality; but then with the insight only Spock could have the Vulcan knew with complete certainty that the man who stood before him, wearing his friend's face and form, contained not even the darker side of Jim Kirk.

He knew, as only the Vulcan could, that this was not his Captain.

The moment passed, and the inexplicably altered landing party stopped glaring at Spock and began to look at themselves and each other, with an air that was at once bewildered and threatening. Quietly, Spock drew his phaser. The man who looked exactly like his Captain and friend advanced on him once more. Spock levelled his phaser, and the stranger halted, a look of fury and utter contempt in his eyes.

"What Vulcan trickery is this, Spock?" the stranger spat out in a vicious parody of Jim Kirk's voice. "I never did believe you when you said you didn't want the captaincy - what have you done? What are these uniforms? You won't get away with it, you pointed-eared freak!"

Spock said nothing in reply. With his free hand he flipped open his communicator and ordered a Security team to the transporter room. Then he turned his attention to the other three members of the landing party, but without taking his eyes from the Kirk imposter in front of him. That one was too dangerous by half.

They were all the same, Spock realised immediately; all of them were cruel and full of hatred - barbarians, that was it, even the one who looked like McCoy. And this one was accusing him of attempting to usurp Jim's place. But where was Jim? And where had these four come from?

The Security team arrived at took charge of the four imposters. It said something about their knowledge of, and respect for the First Officer that they accepted without question his quick explanation that these were not the real Captain Kirk and the others. It was not, of course, the first time the Enterprise had had trouble of that nature.

As the Security team led them out, Spock noticed that none of the others had said anything, and even the Kirk look-alike had said very little once he realised that he was being arrested - but he glared at Spock with open hatred. That look from one identical in appearance to the real Jim Kirk almost made him flinch, and he turned instead to observe the other three, only to find the same hatred in their eyes.

Spock followed them, his mind working at its usual computer speed. All four of them had accepted arrest as if it was a normal circumstance where they came from. Where they came from...? Then it hit him like a photon torpedo. The ion storm! Of course! He must get to the computer.

First, however, he went with the Security team to the brig, hoping to get some clue from them as to the nature of the universe from which they had come. For that was the only logical explanation; the power surge at the moment of materialisation was a clue, and Spock remembered how it had seemed that the landing party had almost been brought aboard at the first attempt, before Transporter Chief Kyle had been forced to make his last-minute adjustments to beam them safely aboard through the ion storm. Then... the first, incomplete beam-up must have been the original landing party.

Spock stood at the door of the brig compartment containing the four imposters. As he stood watching the 'Captain's' fury behind the force-field screen, and listened to the abuse and bribery attempts, Spock understood that, absurd as it might seem, these were not really imposters, but were as real a Kirk, Scott, McCoy and Uhura in their own universe as the people he had known for so long were in his. He thought of the many disparaging remarks he had made to McCoy concerning Human nature, and knew that in his worst hidden jokes he had never thought to see Humans - especially ones who in every physical way looked identical to his friends - behave in such a manner. Spock also realised he would get no sense out of any of them, if indeed they possessed any. He left them and hurried to the Bridge.

As he rode in the turbolift he made rapid calculations. If the ion storm had created the conditions that made such an exchange possible, was it possible to re-create them artificially? He believed it was. He would have to tap the power out of the warp engines, and balance it for the four 'others'.

But the timing of the exchange would be critical, and would only be possible if it was done at exactly the same moment when the real Jim Kirk and his companions were beaming back. Spock had no doubt that they would realise what had happened, and would consult the computer. He was suddenly very glad that Jim had Scotty with him. The best person to be with him in such a situation was the Chief Engineer, since it could not be Spock himself.

Then a thought struck Spock which he didn't like at all. In the other universe there had to be another Spock, and judging by the complete reversal in character exhibited by the four occupants of the brig, any Spock in that universe was likely to be a very dangerous enemy to the real James Kirk. All Spock could hope for was that Jim had realised what had happened soon enough to pose as the 'other' Kirk, the one he had just witnessed behaving almost like a primitive.

He had no doubt that Jim was capable of thinking that quickly; he had witnessed the rapidity of his friend's mind in impossible situations before, and no doubt McCoy, Scotty and Uhura would follow his lead at a moment's notice, but Spock knew himself and his Captain... and it seemed only logical to assume that the 'other' Spock would know his.

The turbolift arrived at its destination, and he quickly made his face expressionless, removing all trace of the anxiety he felt sure was showing before the doors opened in front of him.

Having checked with Sulu - who had been left in command - that there had been no further communication from the Halkan Council, Spock strode to his library computer station, pressed several switches, and looked into the viewer. He knew that by now everyone of the Bridge would have heard of the four look-alikes held in the brig, and they would no doubt be putting two and two together. Frowning slightly to himself at the way Human expressions were continually finding their way into his thoughts, he realised that the members of the Bridge crew were due an explanation of what was going on. But that would have to wait until he had finished his computations.

He knew that his friends were unlikely to discover the process for

transporting themselves back before he did, but he had to cover all eventualities. The transporter would have to be monitored for signs of their attempt to return. Spock only hoped that they had asked the computer the right questions.

Illogical, of course, to think that they would do otherwise, he thought with a part of his mind, while he continued to scan the rows of figures in the viewer. At last he looked up. The computer had confirmed his suspicions - the two-way matter transmission was affecting local field density between the two universes; what was more, it was still increasing. If Jim and the others didn't transport back before the density made it impossible, they wouldn't have another opportunity for... he estimated it at approximately 98.732 years. Then he really did frown.

Chekov, at the navigation console, had looked round at just the right moment to see the Science Officer look up from the computer with nothing less than a worried expression. So Chekov started worrying. He had heard that four imposters had beamed aboard instead of the real Captain Kirk and the rest of the landing party, but had assumed that Mr. Spock would sort it out and get the genuine articles back. But if the First Officer was worried, then it had to be serious. Chekov quickly turned back to his board before Mr. Spock should catch him staring.

Spock was indeed worried, and knew it, though he didn't know Chekov had noticed. There wasn't that much time to spare. He pressed a few more switches and after a moment a small tape slid from the computer console; he picked it up and began to walk towards the turbolift, pausing on the way to inform Sulu he was still in the centre seat.

The turbolift seemed to be moving much slower than usual. It was not, he knew. Telling himself once again it was not possible that Jim and the others could possibly have worked out the process for returning before he had, he nevertheless couldn't entirely suppress the thought that they might be making the attempt to return even at that moment, while he was stuck in the turbolift and unable to do anything.

Spock went straight to Engineering, found the Engineer in charge in Scotty's absence, and with a rapid explanation of the situation, both he and the startled Engineer went quickly to work on the complicated task of tapping the necessary power from the warp engines.

The work was soon done, and Spock found himself very grateful for the careful way Scotty chose the men for his section. But had they done it soon enough?

Having quickly given the Engineer the thanks for his assistance a Human needed, the firmly-controlled Vulcan left for the transporter room, stopping only to contact the brig and give the order for Security to return the four prisoners to the transporter. Resisting the temptation to waste time - illogically - by checking with Kyle to see if any attempt at returning had yet been made, Spock covered the rest of the distance to the transporter room in record time.

Kyle immediately informed the First Officer that there had been no detectable trace of transporter activity. Telling Kyle that he would handle the controls himself, Spock stepped behind the console and began checking and adjusting settings. This was one beaming-aboard he was going to see to personally, and that was for certain.

Security arrived with the four loudly-grumbling captives. They looked as if they would like to kill Spock - and anyone else who might be around for that matter - if it were not for the phasers trained on them. When he ordered them to stand on the transporter platform the 'other' Kirk almost exploded in fury, and uttered a great many words Spock had never heard before, though he was left in no doubt as to their meaning. It was not until Spock informed him that he could quite easily be transported unconscious that he decided to shut up and take his place on the platform alongside the other three, and all four glared

at Spock in such a way that if looks could kill he would have withered on the spot.

Fortunately Spock was unaffected by the hatred directed towards him, and having decided that to try to explain to them would be a waste of breath as well as of precious time, he turned his attention to the business in hand.

Then the wait began. Spock stood motionless behind the console, waiting for the telltale signs that would mean the real Jim Kirk, McCoy, Scotty and Uhura were making the return attempt. He seemed to be standing there for hours, and try as he would to suppress it, into his mind crept the thought that perhaps Jim and the others had been captured, or that they had failed to realise what had happened, or that they had failed to gain access to the computer or to Engineering in time. So many things could have gone wrong...

Firmly he squashed the thought. He could not allow himself to think like that, not when everything might depend on his operation of the transporter console at the critical moment.

Time was getting on. There were now less than four minutes left before the field density made any return impossible. The four who still stood on the transporter discs were beginning to show signs of impending mutiny, phasers or no, and Spock was beginning to wonder how much longer they would be able to keep them there without a struggle, when things began to happen.

A familiar but faint hum came from the console, and on the board in front of him a light began to flash. Carefully he started to move the controls, not noticing that he was holding his breath. If the imposters moved, or attempted to jump off the platform now... But miraculously they did not. Spock pulled a lever down. Just a few more moments... The four figures dissolved into columns of glittering light. So far, so good.

The figures vanished. Spock pushed a switch, changed a setting. He knew it wasn't very Vulcan, but he could feel his heart beating much faster than it ought. At least it didn't show...

Still holding his breath he pulled another lever. Four glowing columns appeared on the platform, twinkled, faded. Rapidly he changed another setting, pulled the lever right down. The columns grew stronger, began to solidify, and finally changed into the forms of the four people he had almost believed he would never see standing there again.

This time, when the transporter hum died, a certain Vulcan began to breathe again. He needed no further confirmation that these were indeed his friends; he had known it even before the grins appeared on the faces of the real Kirk and McCoy, and although he knew that that wasn't very Vulcan either, Spock almost felt like grinning back.

SONNET by Meg Wright

You would not let me stay, you bade me leave,
Denying me the right to take your place.
Being part Human, what can I do but partly grieve?
Hiding my pain, my mask before my face.

Around me others yield to grief and weep,
Within my brain a half-formed plan takes fire -
You may still live; my heart within may leap
But I will bear it down, show no desire.

The space surrounding us is strange, unknown,
I'll tear the very fabric of our world apart
To find you. Risking others, not myself alone,
Trusting McCoy to heal us, hiding my heart.

While others show this joy with tears and word
I stand beside your shoulder, love unheard.

END GAME by Elaine Wells

"How's it going, Jim?" asked McCoy, as he strolled into the private ward.

Kirk was oblivious of all around him. He sat hunched in the chair at the side of Spock's bed, his eyes fixed unseeingly on the chessboard, one hand clenched around a discarded pawn.

At McCoy's greeting Spock gave him a silent response of welcome, then, as the doctor bent to draw Kirk from his abstraction, Spock stopped him with an authoritative movement of his hand.

McCoy gave him a half-puzzled look, but chose to respect the fierce determination that Kirk should not be disturbed. Jim hadn't had any time to himself these last few days, caught up in the wheels of bureaucracy as he made all the interminable reports to Starfleet. He wouldn't have had time to come to terms with the decisions he'd been forced to make. Perched on the edge of one of the spare beds, McCoy used the time as an opportunity to check up on Spock's progress - and Jim's.

As usual Spock's face was impassive as he sat upright in the bed, the covers and his person immaculate. The diagnostic panel continued to support Spock's contention that he was now fully recovered from the effects of the lead projectile which had injured him, and his collapse on the Captain's return to the ship.

The chessboard was swung out over the bed to rest squarely between the two men, but neither of them were paying any attention to it. Kirk, his eyes dull with inner pain, was completely unaware of his surroundings, whilst Spock made no attempt now to disguise the fact that all his attention was given to the study of Kirk's face. Offhand, McCoy couldn't recall the last time he'd seen Spock looking so approachable.

//He must have relaxed his barriers - so he's there, waiting and open, in case Jim needs him...//

Kirk gave an almost imperceptible shuddering sigh and his face tightened before all expression drained away again. Spock's eyes lifted and widened in answer to the sound. He stopped at birth the impulse to reach out to Jim.

It came so hard to realise he could not protect this man from every harm, every hurt the Galaxy had to offer. If only Jim would verbalise his grief, his guilt - illogical emotions in the circumstances. Jim had no alternative but to act as he had done, yet he persisted in this belief that he must carry the load alone. When would he come to realise that Humans were never intended to attempt Vulcan control - when would he learn to share all of himself, the dark side as well as the sun...?

McCoy caught his breath as he saw in Spock's eyes, in his unguarded face, the emotion he had once taunted him with being unable to experience...

//But that was in a different place, and we are different people. We've come a long way since then. But I've never known him like this - he must know I'm still here, yet he's done nothing to conceal it. No barriers shutting me out of what the two of you have together. Thank you for your trust, Spock... but... you don't believe in half measures, do you? Opposite, yet the perfect complement to each other, two sides of the coin. Does Jim know about this, does he understand the full extent of what you feel for him, its commitment? Do you, yet?//

Having no wish to intrude further on Spock's privacy McCoy turned again to his study of Kirk's face and the uncharacteristically still figure. The skin around the Captain's mouth was still deeply fretted with lines of strain that Spock's spell in Sickbay had done nothing to ease. Some of those lines would never go, though Kirk still looked ridiculously young to be a veteran Starship Captain...

The mission had been a bitch from the beginning. McCoy gave a silent snort of disgust. He dreaded these stops on so-called Paradise planets.

Paradise was too damn expensive, someone always got hurt. This time it had been Spock critically injured. And Jim had spent the next three days with the knowledge that Spock could be dying burning within him as he fought to discover a solution to the Klingons' interference with Tyree's world. The same world that Jim had found peace and friendship on so many years ago. Yet another bond lost in the call of duty... Tyree had tried to understand... Would Jim's plan work? Only time would tell if he'd succeeded in redressing the balance of power - if he hadn't, the results are gonna be kind of permanent for the hill people...

//Think Jim doesn't know that, isn't agonising over it right now? You were a great help when he needed you! He came to you with a burden that was threatening to crush him and you just let him have it right between the eyes; used every bitter, emotional argument in the book; told him everything he already knew... If ever there had been a time for logic, for Spock... Yet Jim understood the reason for my attack, he understood too damn much. If he'd died from that Mugato bite - the whole damn planet would never even have registered with me...//

McCoy surfaced from his abstraction to find Spock watching him, his face softened with concern as he noted the remorse and anxiety in the doctor's eyes. The look slowly faded as McCoy visibly shook himself out of it, and gave Spock a reassuring grin.

//Spock has that enviable knack of making you feel better simply with a look. Always there when you need him... Pity I can't patent him as a tonic... Tonic! McCoy, that's the best idea you've had all night. Time Jim stopped wallowing in vain regrets. Ifs and maybes are no use to anyone...//

Returning to the ward moments later, a decanter and three glasses in his hands, McCoy noted the lift of a disapproving eyebrow. "Purely medicinal," he assured the Vulcan's sceptical figure.

"Indeed. Then three glasses would appear to be surplus to requirements, Doctor, as I am the only patient in the wards at present. Whether that state of affairs will continue after you have imbibed that..." Spock gave the decanter a decidedly disparaging glance.

"This is twenty-year-old brandy," protested McCoy in an indignant whisper, "but I'll sacrifice some of it for the pleasure of watching you eat those words - and don't tell me that's impossible," he warned as Spock opened his mouth. "I'm not in the mood."

Spock accepted the proffered glass with resignation, then staring at McCoy through narrowed eyes asked, "Your health is not impaired in any way, Doctor?"

Again that hint of concern, the underlying willingness to help, to involve himself in another's pain...

"My health's fine - you just worry about your own," McCoy advised. "But thanks anyway. If you're good, I'll let you out of here tomorrow," he added, passing a glass of brandy in front of the Captain.

Kirk's nose twitched and his eyes came back into focus as the welcome aroma of Saurian brandy drifted past his nostrils.

"Oh... Hello, Bones," he said vaguely, automatically reaching to take the glass. He took a deep breath, stared into its amber depths, and then drained it.

At this cavalier and untypical treatment of vintage brandy, McCoy stiffened in outrage. "Oh... Hello," he echoed sarcastically. "Is that all you can say? I've been here nearly half an hour, and all the response I get is an outstretched hand." //The palm of which still has the imprint of that chess piece embedded in it...// "Now you want another, I suppose?"

McCoy's mock-ferocious attack drew Kirk back into the present. The austerity of his face was dispelled by a smile of seductive sweetness. "Sorry,

Bones," he apologised. "I was light years away... thinking..."

It was time Kirk snapped out of this. "No kiddin'? Well, I'm glad something 'bout you's functioning. I was beginning to wonder if you'd got frozen to the spot... About time you spared a thought for the chess game, isn't it?" he added as he saw Kirk's eyes slide down from Spock's face to glance at the board. "You look in trouble to me."

Kirk's face relaxed as he met McCoy's malicious grin. Bones knew as much about chess... "Oh, that... Yeah, I was in a spot of bother." He gave Spock's silent figure a challenging look from beneath his lashes. "But I've got it licked now. Mate in five moves, Spock."

The Vulcan didn't even glance at the board, just returned Kirk's expectant smile with a certain smug impassiveness. "In three, I believe, Jim," he said innocently.

The final shadows vanished as Kirk searched his face, then dropped his eyes back to the board. "You're bluffing!" announced Kirk, as he actually gave his attention to the end-game.

Spock took a cautious sip of his brandy and found it unexpectedly pleasant. "Vulcans never bluff," he said firmly as he tipped a good half of his brandy into Kirk's empty glass.

Kirk was completely caught up in the teasing challenge, his nightmare visions lost in the warmth of reality. "You could have fooled me after some of the crazy stunts you've pulled in the past... Shit! And I was so sure I'd got you this time! Pumped full of the dope Bones gave you, you should have been an easy target."

"Jim, you cannot be serious..."

Startled, his eyes wide with concern, Kirk reached out to take Spock's hand. Had Spock ~~misunderstood~~ him? He could be so damn literal at times...

"...You cannot be suggesting that I would permit Dr. McCoy to administer anything more lethal than a vitamin shot."

Kirk dissolved into laughter as he shook his head in self-condemnation. "Me - taken for a ride by my own First Officer... Maybe I should be the one in Sickbay, Bones - I'm slowing down in my old age. I admire your courage, Spock - there's a nasty glint in Bones' eye..."

"Nasty! You ain't seen nothin' yet. I've never been so insulted in my life!"

Spock had only once been trapped like that by the doctor. Now he ignored the desolate look of hurt that McCoy was so earnestly projecting. "Never?" he inquired in a tone of polite disbelief.

Kirk choked on a mouthful of brandy and McCoy gave Spock a measuring look before his face creased into a smile.

"Well, maybe a few times - but never so politely. You've proved your point. If you're well enough to needle me and take Jim on, you're fit enough for duty. Just don't go overdoing it," he cautioned as Spock immediately swung his legs out of the bed, "or I'll have you back in Sickbay so fast it'll make your head spin."

Made confident by his earlier success, Spock opened his mouth. Quickly, Kirk placed his hand over it.

"No, Spock. Quit while you're ahead. Sparring with Bones is like trying to bang your head against a rubber wall - and I'll explain that to you later," he said hastily before Spock's left eyebrow had risen more than a millimetre.

Suddenly self-conscious, Kirk removed his hand. McCoy remembered something requiring his attention elsewhere, and with a mumbled explanation disappeared into the next room. Neither of them heard what he said.

"Thanks for being here, Spock. I was in danger of wallowing in... I really screwed things up down there..."

"You took the only logical option, Jim. The Klingons and reasoned debate are incompatible. I believe your solution will ensure survival for the majority. It is not a way of life I would advocate, but once there is survival, the majority will surely decide to abandon hostilities in favour of..."

"You damn nearly didn't survive that one." The words dropped coldly into the warmth between them, shattering all pretence. Kirk turned his exposed face, his naked pain, away from Spock's all-seeing gaze.

It was only now, now that they were back on the ship, with the crisis over, that realisation of what he'd nearly lost had hit him. Losing any member of the crew hurt - the years hadn't lessened the pain of that, and there were no good casualties, but this...

//How did we ever come to this? He is a part of myself... How many times must I risk losing you?//

A sudden sensation of heat at his back told him that Spock had risen and was standing directly behind him.

"Next time I will endeavour to ensure that you are in the rear," promised Spock, with a certain wry humour. The probability factor of his ever being able to achieve that...

Kirk spun round to face him and closed his mouth on an angry retort as he accepted the unsaid. Danger was their ever-present reality. The responsibility had always been his; only recently had he recognised how much more so where Spock was concerned. They had survived, one more time...

"Yeah, well... Next time try yelling or something - I'd kind of like to keep you intact. A good First Officer is hard to come by..."

"I will take your suggestion under advisement," promised Spock gravely.

With a look of open disbelief Kirk began putting the chess pieces away as Spock slowly dressed. Kirk stared, shocked as he saw Spock back in his familiar uniform.

"D'you know how much weight you've lost in the past week?" he said accusingly.

"Approximately 3.95 kilos," replied Spock promptly.

"Approx... you didn't exactly have a lot to spare! This is ridiculous - that uniform's hanging on you. You're eating with me now - and that's an order. Then, after a meal, d'you feel like risking another defeat at chess?" he offered in a belated effort to conceal his concern. //You'll be giving him hot milk next, but - God, he's so skinny...//

Spock gave Kirk's fidgeting figure an inscrutable look. "That would be most pleasant. I find it makes a fascinating study..."

"What does?" enquired Kirk suspiciously as he took in Spock's preternaturally grave expression. //If he makes one crack about...//

"Your eternal optimism," responded Spock promptly, taking pity on Kirk's embarrassment.

He held his ground as Kirk advanced to within inches of him, until they stood only a breath apart, but Kirk was unable to maintain his ferocious scowl or the laughter and the sudden surge of love that threatened to overwhelm him.

"One day, Spock," he vowed, backing away from examining his feelings too closely. "One day..." //One day I'll tell you just what you mean to me...//
"C'mon, let's go feed you up."

Humming softly under his breath, his hand lightly resting on Spock's back, Kirk hoisted the chessboard more securely in his free arm before leading the way to the main Rec. room.

Plastered by Shirley Buck



It was to be a black day on the Enterprise. They were proceeding at Warp 2 across a long lonely stretch of space near the edge of the galaxy on their way to Starbase 4 for R & R. It had been a long, hard time since their last leave, and all hands were looking forward to the break - not least the Captain.

Kirk was on the Bridge when the intercom buzzed. "Kirk here."

"Scott here, Captain. I'm having a wee spot of trouble with the matter/antimatter reactor."

"Specify please, Scotty."

"Weel, the temperature is rising for no apparent reason, sir. I'm afraid I'm going to have to shut off warp drive to find out the cause."

Inwardly Kirk groaned, but he knew Scotty too well to question his decision. "Very well, Scotty. Get on to it quickly and return us to warp drive as soon as you can. Kirk out."

Spock raised a quizzical eyebrow at the expression on Kirk's face, but made no comment.

Two hours later Scotty had not located the problem, and Kirk was tapping his fingers as the Enterprise drifted along on impulse power. Kirk pressed

the intercom button.

"Scotty, have you located the trouble yet?"

"Aye, I have, Captain; and it's more serious than I thought. It's starting to affect parts of the life-support systems too. I'm afraid I'm going to have to shut parts of it down for a short time."

"Is that really necessary, Scotty?"

"I'm afraid it is, Captain. If I don't get the problem fixed quickly, we're going to have all sorts of trouble all over..."

Before he could finish the Sickbay channel cut in, and McCoy could be heard shouting, "We have a flash fire in Sickbay, not under control yet!"

"On my way. Spock, you have the con!" Kirk snapped, and headed for the turbolift at top speed.

Somehow or other he tripped up the steps and sprawled full length on the deck. He tried to get up, but an agonising pain in his left leg prevented him from rising.

"Spock, give me a hand here!" he shouted. Spock and Chekov rushed to help him, and Uhura tried to raise Sickbay.

Dr. McCoy was a worried man. The fire in Sickbay was out now, but there had been a lot of damage which had not yet been assessed. Now, to add to his problems, he had Captain Kirk with a broken leg on the one diagnostic bed that was still functioning properly. To crown it all, Captain Kirk was not happy. He was not happy at all.

"And," reflected McCoy, "he'll be even less happy when I tell him that the liquid plastifier has been destroyed and I can't set his leg!"

Spock appeared that the Sickbay door and viewed the devastation that the fire had wrought. "Under control, I see," he said calmly.

"Under control!" McCoy spluttered. "Under control!!! What's under control? Nothing, as far as I can see. I don't know what drugs I have or haven't got. Most of the diagnostic beds aren't functioning. We are knee-deep in debris. The liquid plastifier isn't working, and I have the Captain with a broken leg. And you say 'under control'!"

"Doctor, I fail to see what an emotional outburst will do to help the situation. The fire is out; as for the rest, once you give your time and attention to the problems, all will be resolved in due time. May I offer my services in whatever capacity you consider necessary?"

McCoy swallowed his anger at Spock, realising that he was right. "Right now, the main problem is the Captain's leg. He is not taking too kindly to lying on a bed while the 'ship falls apart around his ears', as he puts it," said McCoy ruefully. "With the liquid plastifier out of action I can't set his leg."

"I seem to recall a method used in the 20th century, involving plaster of Paris. A somewhat cumbersome method, but nevertheless effective. I also recall that Ensign Watkins makes plaster of Paris models as a hobby. May I suggest you call the Ensign to enquire whether he has enough to set the Captain's leg."

"Well, Spock, whatever I might think of you, you certainly turn up trumps at the right moment. I'll call the Ensign straightaway."

"I fail to see what relevance a card game has to the present situation, but I endorse your intention to call the Ensign. In the meantime I will endeavour to ascertain the problem with the liquid plastifier."

* * *

On the one functioning diagnostic bed Captain Kirk lay with his left leg firmly bandaged to a plastic splint. Out of reach of an intercom, he didn't know what was happening to the Enterprise, although he could tell she was still on impulse power. Unable to stand the inaction any longer, he yelled for McCoy.

"Bones! Bones! What the hell is going...?" The words died on his lips as McCoy came in with a wide grin on his face and his arms full of plastic bags.

"Well, Jim, we'll soon have your leg set."

"What with? Plastic bags?! Come on now, Bones - I want to get out of here. What's happening to the warp drive? Is the fire out? What's the damage? Dammit, Bones, get me out of here!!!"

"Steady now, Jim. All in good time. Scotty says he's located the problem, but it will take a few hours to fix it. The fire is out, but I don't know the full damage yet, apart from the liquid plastifier, which you already know about. I can set your leg right away, and with any luck you'll be up and about tomorrow."

Slightly mollified, Kirk gave a wry grin. "Sorry, Bones. What have you got to set my leg with?"

An hour later McCoy stood at Kirk's side as he lay unconscious on the bed and surveyed his handiwork with pride. From mid-thigh to his toes Kirk's left leg was covered in a thick layer of plaster of Paris. The bed, floor and McCoy were covered with splashes from his efforts at mixing the plaster and then setting the leg.

Gradually Kirk's eyelids fluttered and opened, and he tried to focus on McCoy's face. "Is it done?" he murmured. "Can I get up?"

"No, no, Jim," McCoy replied. "Take it easy. Let the anaesthetic wear off and have a good sleep. The plaster will take a good time to dry, anyway."

"Okay, Bones - I don't feel like doing anything else, anyway. My leg aches like hell."

"I'll give you a painkiller for that, and I'll also give you a cell rejuvenator injection to speed the healing process."

"What's the situation with the Enterprise now?" asked Kirk as McCoy administered the shots.

"Don't know, I'm afraid, Jim. Spock will be along shortly, though, to bring you up to date with the situation. I'm sure he's got everything under control."

"We're still under impulse power," Kirk observed. "I wonder what's taking Scotty so long?"

At that moment Spock appeared in the doorway. "I trust you are feeling better, Captain?" he said formally.

"I'll survive, thank you, Spock. What's the situation?"

"Mr. Scott has managed to effect the repairs on the life support system; he is at present working on the matter/antimatter reactor. We should have warp drive in 12.32 hours."

Kirk smiled at the Vulcan's precision. "And the Sickbay?"

"Yeah, Spock, the Sickbay. Is it 'under control'?" said McCoy sarcastically.

Spock ignored the sarcasm and replied seriously, "Yes, Doctor. While you were setting the Captain's leg we managed to clear most of the debris. Nurse Chapel is at present checking the drugs. Unfortunately the liquid plastifier is not going to be easily repaired. Mr. Scott will have to make several new parts before I shall be able to effect a repair."

"Well, Mr. Spock, I see I can leave things safely in your hands and in Scotty's," said Kirk with a tired sigh. "I shall endeavour to join you on the Bridge as soon as possible."

"Very well, Captain. I look forward to your return. However, I have taken the precaution of having these made up for you," and he pointed to a pair of crutches leaning against the wall.

Next morning, after a good night's sleep and further shots of painkiller and cell rejuvenator, Kirk was ready to go. With McCoy and Nurse Chapel standing by, he sat up.

"Would you like the crutches now, Captain?" asked Nurse Chapel.

"No, no. I won't need crutches," Kirk replied, and tried to swing his legs over the side of the bed. The right one swung easily, but the left one refused to budge. Kirk looked at it, amazed. He tried to move it again, and again, nothing.

"Bones, what's going on? I can't move my leg!"

"Well, Jim, I did say it would be heavy."

"But I can't even lift it, let alone walk with it!"

McCoy was as perplexed as Kirk. "Well, it must be possible. It was standard treatment in the 20th century. Let Nurse Chapel and me lift it to the floor, then try it."

Kirk nodded assent. McCoy and Nurse Chapel supported the leg and swung it gently over the side of the bed and lowered it to the ground.

Kirk groaned. "Hell and damnation, Bones! Are you sure you've done it right? I feel as if my leg is being pulled off!"

McCoy was hurt. "Really, Jim! It's only a question of getting used to it. I think the crutches would be a good idea. You can't put any weight on that leg yet, y'know. I'll support your foot while you get up on the crutches."

Kirk agreed to give it a go, but as soon as he tried to stand an excruciating pain shot down his leg, and he gasped and sat back.

"I thought you'd given me a painkiller, Bones," he muttered through clenched teeth.

"I did, Jim. It's just the circulation beginning to work properly again. Try wiggling your toes."

"You've got to be kidding!" said Kirk, but he tried nevertheless; to his surprise his toes wiggled and the pain eased.

So, little by little, with McCoy supporting the cast and Nurse Chapel supporting the Captain, Kirk managed to hobble around the Sickbay. He was white and sweating when he got back to the bed.

"I'll never be able to manage this on my own!" groaned Kirk.

"Sure you will, Jim!" said McCoy. "It's all a matter of practice. You're getting the hang of it already. You'll be exercising in the gym before you know it."

Kirk managed a grin and prepared himself for another circuit of the Sickbay. At that moment Spock appeared.

"Good morning, Captain. I trust you are feeling better this morning?"

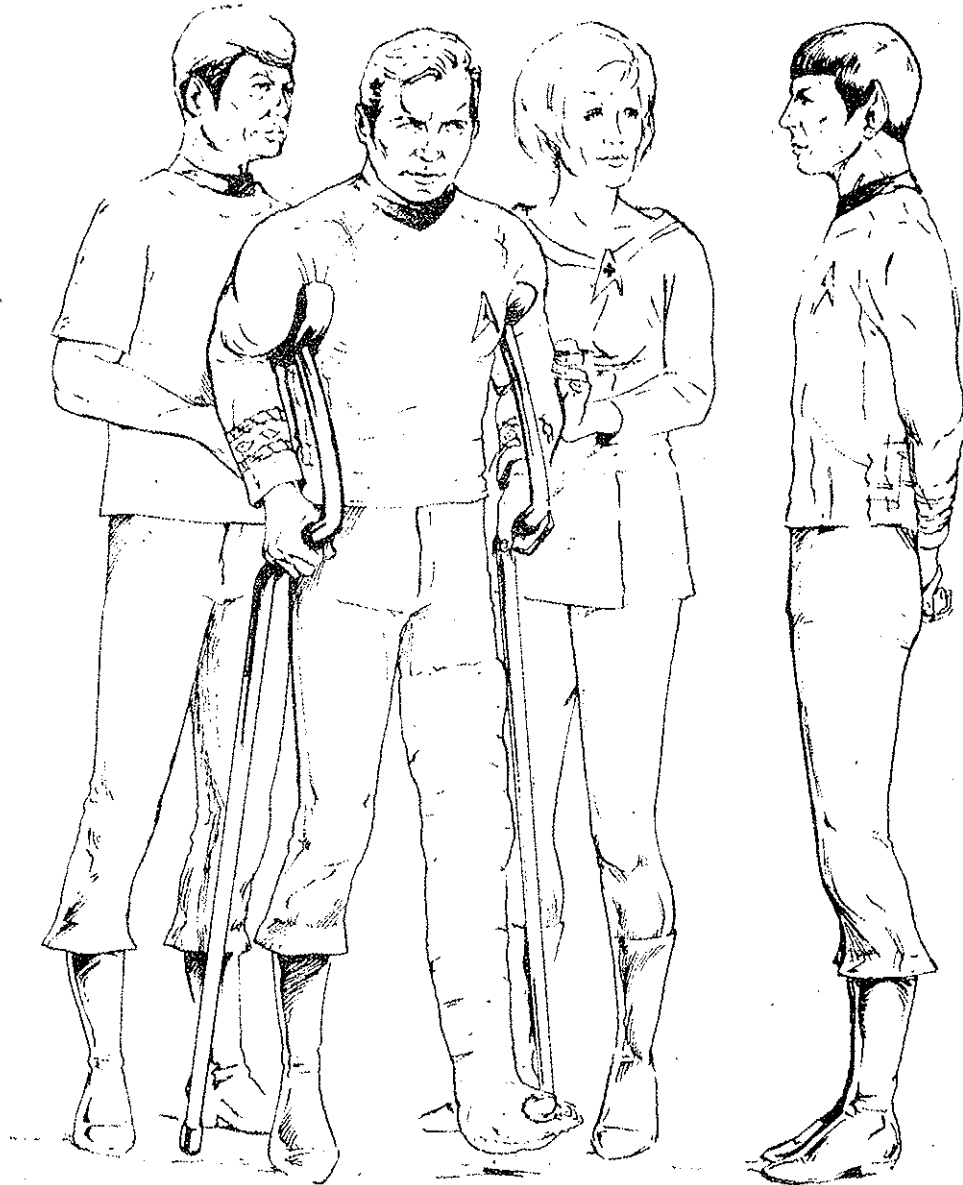
"Feeling better, yes. But getting around with this..." he gestured to the cast, "attached to my leg is practically impossible."

"On the contrary, Captain. It certainly is possible. It is all a question of muscle control, which should not be difficult for one who has

always kept himself fit by exercise, as you have done." Apparently ignoring Kirk's open-mouthed stare, and McCoy's and Nurse Chapel's grins, Spock continued, "Mr. Scott has effected repairs to the warp drive reactor, and with your permission wishes to engage warp drive as soon as possible."

"Permission granted. I trust Mr. Scott will now be able to make the parts you want for the liquid plastifier."

"Thank you, Captain. Yes, I am sure that Mr. Scott and I will be able to repair the machine within a few days."



With that Spock disappeared through the Sickbay door, heading for the Bridge. Kirk stared after him.

"I'm damned if I'll let that pointed-eared Vulcan get the better of me," said Kirk with a grin. "Come on, Bones - let's try another circuit and bumps."

Two days later the Captain was the menace of the Enterprise corridors. As usual, Spock had been right, and Kirk had quickly come to grips with managing the plaster and the crutches. He managed quite a speed along the Enterprise corridors, and no-one knew when they might turn a corner to find the Captain bearing down on them at top speed. It took agility to get out of

the way of his flashing crutches and plastered leg; and he was always so charmingly apologetic if he did manage to hit someone.

It came as something of a relief to all the crew when Mr. Spock was able to report that the liquid plastifier machine was operational again.

AMOK TIME by Sheryl Peterson

"Kroykah!"

T'Pau's voice.

Like a knife

It pierces the Plak Tow -

Cuts free the bonds

Of my tormented mind.

Rest!

Cease fighting!

Cease the madness!

Release for but a moment,

Then to fight again.

But as my hands loosen,

Momentarily

On the Ahn Woon,

My eyes look upon the face

Of my vanquished foe,

And - traitorously -

They clear,

And I see -

Jim!

He lies there like a tired child.

His face pale - bruised.

His chest torn and bloody.

The Ahn Woon

Strangling that familiar neck

Held by my strength!

Jim!!

He does not breathe -

He is not dead

Not by my hand!

I look at him, dazed -

Not comprehending

How this could be.

It must be one of his jokes!

Jokes - the bane of Humans.

Any minute he will leap up

And laugh at me...

Jim?!!!

Suddenly McCoy is between us

Pushing his way

As if he loathes me,

As if to touch me, even,

Is abhorrent.

Denying me the right

To touch Jim now

Or ever again.

I drop the Ahn Woon

And stagger away

On nerveless feet,

Like a sleeper

Awakening from a dream

That was no dream.

I am Vulcan.

That has always been my pride,

And my defence,

Against the Human world.

Vulcan blood brought me here.

The Pon Farr

Called me, the half-Vulcan,

Home to take a mate

As my fathers before me.

Are thee Vulcan

Or are thee Human?"

T'Pau demanded harshly

When I begged for Jim's life,

And the Plak Tow

Answered for me,

Filling me with madness.

I became a thing of instinct,

Of killing reflexes

And unleashed power.

I knew only

That I was a Vulcan -

And nothing would deny me

My mate!

I have fought and won.

T'Pring awaits my pleasure.

As never before, perhaps,

I am totally Vulcan,

Accepted at last by my kind.

But it is all a lie.

I have killed Jim,

Who was my one and only friend.

A Vulcan would not grieve.

Kalifar - the Challenge.

Two men fight -

One dies.

A logical conclusion.

T'Pau's face is like stone

As is mine.

But my heart breaks.

McCoy's Law : A hangdog Vulcan hovering around Sickbay indicates a sick Captain.

Corollary : A hangdog Captain hovering around Sickbay indicates a sick Vulcan.

THE LAKE by Mariann Hornlein

Captain's Log : Stardate 3946.7, Lieutenant-Commander Scott reporting.

"In accordance with Starfleet instructions the Captain and Mr. Spock have beamed down to the planet Aluria to open preliminary trade negotiations for the mining and sale of the ore Plytinate. We are proceeding to Starbase 14 to pick up the delegates from the Federation who will conduct the actual negotiations. Estimated time of return : fourteen days."

Captain James T. Kirk put his communicator away and looked ruefully at his First Officer. "Fourteen days! I hope they're not all going to be spent in trade negotiations!"

Spock nodded towards a group of approaching humanoids. "The Alurians are well known for their logical analyses of all points connected with trade. I am sure they will view these fourteen days as practice for the real negotiations, and will keep most of our time occupied."

The Captain groaned. "Great!" He looked appraisingly at the Vulcan. "Maybe you can take over some of the sessions - you'll probably understand their logic better than I will, anyway. I've heard that this planet is famous for its fishing."

A raised eyebrow was all the answer the First Officer could give before the Alurians arrived. The Captain watched their approach warily. Fourteen days with beings who were, if possible, even more logical than Spock! The Alurians were impressive looking. Perfectly Human in appearance, they had large violet eyes and dark purple hair that contrasted well with the stark white robes they wore.

As they came nearer the Captain noticed a growing horror and fear in their eyes. At first puzzled, he started to grow angry when he realised that their looks were directed at his First Officer. He disliked prejudice at any time, and grew bitterly angry when it was directed at Spock.

One of the group moved ahead of the rest, who stopped and waited for him to speak. Kirk managed to get his words in first.

"Gentlemen, I am Captain James Kirk of the Starship Enterprise, and this is my First Officer, Commander Spock."

The Alurian answered, his voice soft and expressionless. "Captain, my name is A-tir. Forgive our surprise, but we did not realise that a Vulcan would be a member of your crew. Most Human ships do not have that particular species aboard, particularly in a position that would require his beaming down as a member of a trade negotiating team. I suggest that you leave immediately."

Kirk's lips tightened. He made an instinctive movement towards Spock, then caught himself. "I'm sorry, but that is impossible. The Enterprise is on her way to Starbase 14 to pick up the representatives of the Federation and bring them back here. In the meantime Mr. Spock will be in charge of conducting the negotiations, with my help."

Stretching the truth a bit, but he wasn't about to stand for this. He was angry, and didn't really care if they knew it or not.

His thoughts were interrupted by Spock's hand on his arm. "Not necessary, Captain. The Alurians do not operate on the basis of prejudice - it is not logical. There is something else."

A-tir bowed. "Thank you, Commander. You are accurate." He looked steadily at the Vulcan. "We have Rui Fever here."

Spock dropped his hand from Kirk's arm and moved hastily away. Kirk looked at him in astonishment.

"Mr. Spock? What the devil is Rui Fever? And why should it bother the Alurians that you are here?"

Spock glanced at the Alurians, then met Kirk's eyes steadily. "Rui Fever

is, generally, a common cold to the Alurians. It is almost instantly contagious to a Vulcan. When a Vulcan does contract the disease, it is transmuted into a highly virulent strain that is very dangerous to both Alurian and Human. There is a 93.45% chance of you catching the Fever if you are exposed to me after the period of incubation is over."

Kirk was frowning at Spock. He didn't like the sound of this at all! He prompted, "What does that mean, Spock?"

"Put simply, it means that I must remove myself from your presence immediately, and also from the presence of the Alurians. I will be almost instantly contagious in about three hours." He looked at A-tir. "Is there a small cabin or house, preferably near a body of water, where I might retreat?"

Kirk interrupted, "Now wait a minute! If you're going to be sick, I want you where you're going to get proper care, not off by yourself someplace."

"Captain, the level of contagion is too high to risk. I must do this my way."

Kirk stared thoughtfully at the Vulcan. He had the distinct impression that there was something Spock was holding back, but he recognised that look. His First Officer meant to have his own way.

He nodded abruptly. "Very well, Mr. Spock."

He watched with increasing uneasiness as the Alurian gave Spock directions. When the Vulcan turned to leave, Kirk went after him.

"Spock."

The Vulcan moved swiftly away, and expression of... what?... appearing briefly on his face. "Captain, please, I do not think I am contagious yet, but I must ask you not to come closer."

"All right, I won't. May I remind you, Mr. Spock, that I need the services of my First Officer? Just how dangerous is this fever to you? Is there anything I can do?"

The dark eyes flickered. "No, Captain, there is not. The Fever can be somewhat... unpleasant, but with time to prepare I believe I can counteract the most undesirable effects. Now, if you please?"

He waited for the nod of dismissal, then turned and moved swiftly away, the Captain's eyes following him. Just how dangerous was 'somewhat'? A gentle cough caught his attention, and he turned towards the Alurian.

"Captain? The trade negotiations?"

Kirk stared at the group, then nodded curtly. He was escorted to a large building near the place where they beamed down. The Alurians, looks of eager anticipation on their faces, immediately started the negotiations. Kirk tried to listen, but was soon lost in the maze of legalities. They were not so much arguing at him as around him, and his attention wandered.

Rui Fever. He remembered vaguely that McCoy had once said they had some anti-toxin aboard, but that was all he knew. He didn't like the situation at all, and the more he thought about it, the less he liked it. That look that had appeared on Spock's face. At first he thought it had been anger, but the more he analysed it, the more certain he became that it was fear. And Spock didn't show fear for himself, only for his Captain, even when it was he who was in danger.

He interrupted the discussion. "Excuse me, gentlemen. This Rui Fever - do you have any medical information on it as it applies to Vulcans and Humans?"

A-tir appeared confused by the sudden change of subject, then nodded. "Of course, Captain. A-bar will get it for you. I assume that you are concerned for your officer?" At Kirk's nod he continued, "I do not know the exact figures, but I do know that there is a high mortality rate for both races."

A cold knot settled in Kirk's stomach at the words. So that was what that look had meant! The other Alurian brought in a large book and gave it to A-tir.

"With your permission, I will read and translate it for you. Rui Fever - Vulcans. Extremely low resistance to disease. Incubation period - three to five hours. Duration of illness - seven to nine days. Course of disease - delirium, chills for a period of three to six days, depending on the severity of the disease. Followed by periods of violence interspersed with times of extreme weakness. This is the most dangerous time. During the periods of violence, the patient will attack any being around. Lacking a victim, he will attack himself. The times of weakness are equally dangerous, as the patient approaches death due to exhaustion. Last phase of the disease is a deep, coma-like sleep that seems to be completely restorative. Treatment - no known cure, supportive care only. Patient must be kept warm at all times. Fluid must be given as often as possible to prevent dehydration. Restraint during times of violence may result in insanity. During times of weakness, the patient must be kept in touch with his surroundings by any means possible. Mortality rate - without supportive care, 97%. With supportive care, 63.5%."

A-tir looked up at the Captain. Kirk was silent, his face as impassive as Spock's, masking the emotions that seethed inside him.

"Please continue. Humans?"

"Human - contagion possible only from the Vulcan strain. Incubation period - ten to fourteen days. Duration of illness - five to seven days. Course of disease - slight fever, chills, increasing weakness, severe pain. Occasionally lung congestion. Leads gradually to unconsciousness followed by death. Treatment - anti-toxin available, otherwise supportive care only. Care must be taken to prevent strangulation from lung congestion. Care must also be taken to keep patient warm during time of chills. Mortality rate - without supportive care and anti-toxin, 95%; without anti-toxin but with supportive care, 81.2%; with anti-toxin, 23.7%."

There was a long period of silence as Kirk fought for control. The look on Spock's face was altogether too clear now. He had been afraid that if his Captain had realised the extreme danger, he would have insisted on coming along - and he had been right.

Finally Kirk stood up. "Gentlemen, I am sorry, but you will have to wait for the Federation representatives to continue the negotiations. You may not understand, but I have no course of action available to me except to help my First Officer."

A-tir answered, "Captain, may I point out that the Vulcan obviously did not want you present? The negotiations are important. How will Starfleet Command respond to your cutting them off?"

Kirk responded steadily, although he wondered how he was able to do so. "Commander Spock is the best First Officer in the Fleet, and I can ill afford to lose him. In addition, he is... a very close friend. Regardless of what he wishes, my responsibility is clear. Without my help he will probably die. My ship will return in time for me to get the anti-toxin, if I should get the Fever. A-tir, I respect your position; please respect mine."

Although the Alurian had not met Kirk before, he had met other Humans, and he recognised the look on the Captain's face. He pursed his lips, then nodded.

"Very well, Captain. If you will come with me I will show you where Commander Spock is."

Kirk headed swiftly towards the cabin A-tir had indicated. At times he broke into a run. It was nearly six hours since they had beamed down - the Fever had already struck Spock.

Finally he saw the cabin ahead. Cabin! It was more like a log hut! Kirk experienced a momentary surge of anger - what a place to send a person who was ill! - the calmed down as he realised it was probably the best the Alurians could provide without any notice. He vaguely saw a small lake near the cabin, and remembered that Spock had asked that it be near water.

He reached the cabin and pushed against the closed door. Locked? Of course, the violence. If the door was locked, there would not be any way Spock could hurt others, only himself. Kirk worried the lock, pushed at the door, and finally managed to get it open. He entered into the chilly darkness, blinking to get his eyes used to the sudden change of light.

Small, empty, a dingy bed, a bucket of water, an empty fireplace... and Spock. He was lying on the bed, tossing in delirium, two light blankets partially off. Kirk was instantly at his side, pulling the blankets up, raising him up and helping him to drink.

Spock drank thirstily, then opened his eyes. A flicker of fear in their depths, and he tried to twist away.

"Jim - no, please. You must leave."

Kirk caught him by the shoulders and gently forced him back down. "Lie still, Spock. I'm not going anywhere, except to get some firewood. It's much too cold for you in here."

The fear crept into Spock's voice. "Jim, please, you don't understand. When the violence comes... it's not as bad as the pon farr, but it is similar. I... could kill you. I nearly did, once."

Kirk tucked the blankets around him, then laid a hand on Spock's arm. "I'm not leaving. If I do, you'll die. My friend, do you really think I could... just leave?"

A flame flickered deep in Spock's eyes, then he lapsed back into the delirium. Kirk went quickly outside and gathered up the dead wood lying on the ground under a small group of trees. Within minutes he had a fire blazing in the fireplace, and the chill of the cabin was soon dissipated.

The next few days blended into a blur for Kirk. He didn't dare sleep for more than a few moments at a time. Spock would constantly toss off the blankets in his delirium, and then the chills would rack his body. Then the Captain would hold him in his arms, waiting for the warmth of his own body to add to that of the blankets, until the chills would gradually subside. He forced Spock to drink as much and as often as possible, but as time passed it became harder and harder for him to swallow. Then Kirk coaxed, exhorted, pleaded, commanded him to swallow until he would finally convince the Vulcan to take a few more mouthfuls of water.

At times Spock seemed to realise that Kirk was there. He would twist away, shaking his head and muttering, "No!" A touch, a soft command, and he would gradually relax.

The time of violence gradually approached. Kirk hoped that Spock would be weak enough to control, but not so weak that it would be fatal. He knew that he himself was far from being at his best. The days - how many? Six? - of near sleeplessness had greatly depleted his strength.

Kirk had dozed off when suddenly strong hands were around his throat, pulling him up, choking him. Spock's face was close to his, maniacal rage in his eyes.

The Captain grabbed Spock's wrists, pulled at them without result, fought, then finally was able to toss him over his head, tearing the hands loose. Kirk jumped up, gasping for breath, alert for the next move, but Spock lay on the floor, his body shaken by chills. Kirk knelt by his side, raised him, and held him close.

"Spock, hold on. We're half-way through. Hold on!" The shudders quietened, and the Vulcan seemed to sleep.

A new, terrifying routine set in. The Captain didn't know which he dreaded the most, the raging fury or the times of extreme weakness. During these periods of exhaustion Spock would seem to be approaching the point of death. Kirk would hold him, call him over and over, plead with him, command him to respond. Then the response would come - another period of homicidal rage.

The violence seemed to be increasing in length and intensity, instead of decreasing as Kirk had hoped, but he wasn't sure if it was Spock's violence getting stronger, or his own strength getting weaker. The lack of sleep, the constant vigilance, were draining him, and he sometimes wondered if he could last long enough to see Spock through.

He managed to get through most of the rages with a minimum of damage to both himself and Spock. For a while he thought he might be able to get through the entire period without injury. He was wrong.

One time Spock grabbed a piece of firewood, and before Jim could move out of the way he was hit high on the arm. He crashed to the floor, pain screaming from his shoulder. When he rose shakily to his feet, blood was streaming from a deep cut, and his left arm hung limply by his side. He somehow kept out of Spock's way until the Vulcan at last collapsed.

Another time the Captain felt himself being picked up and flung against the wall. He hit his head with a resounding crack, and fire flamed from the back of his skull. When he regained consciousness, Spock was lying down on the floor. No chills shook his body. There was no movement at all.

Kirk's heart contracted with fear, and he tried to go to his friend. When he moved, the fire flamed again, and he fell back.

His hand reached back, and came away covered with blood. He shrugged - time for that later. His head whirling, he crawled slowly over to the still body. He put his good arm under Spock's shoulders and drew him up.

"Spock! Spock, it's Jim! Please answer me! Oh, damn you! Go into a rage! Fight! Do anything, but answer me! Spock!"

The Vulcan's eyes flickered, then opened. They focused on Kirk's face. A smile of welcome, of greeting, appeared on the Vulcan's face.

He whispered, "Jim?"

The smile faded as Spock continued to look at the Captain, and was replaced by a look of concern. "Jim? What's wrong? You... you're so... white?"

Kirk smiled back. "Nothing. Nothing's wrong at all - now. You've got to rest and keep warm. It's almost over."

The Captain managed to pull Spock over to the bed and tumble him in. Spock submitted to the actions without protest, almost as if he wasn't aware they were happening. His eyes sought Kirk's face, and a slight frown furrowed his brow, as if he were trying to find the answer to an unasked question.

Kirk smiled gently down, and he pulled the covers up. "You'll sleep now, and when you wake up you'll be fine."

The frown deepened briefly, then the dark eyes closed and Spock slept. Kirk continued to stand and look at his friend. Spock had made it! He wasn't sure what was going to happen next, after Spock woke up.

He looked around. They needed more firewood, more water. He might as well get them now. He turned to go, then staggered as pain knifed his shoulder. Now that the crisis was over, he realised that he was very weak. His head ached, and the limpness of his arm, the pain, bothered him. Well, there were - how many? - two days left until the Fever could hit him. He was certain he

would get it, after having been in such close contact with Spock. He left to do what had to be done.

Spock woke up feeling strangely whole, as if he had entered into a strange new world. He lay for a long moment, savoring the feel of his body. It was so different from the crisp alertness he usually woke with that he luxuriated in the difference.

He wondered what had happened. He remembered strong arms holding him against some unknown danger, and felt a slight surprise at the irrational desire to feel those arms again. He remembered a voice calling to him, reassuring him, holding off darkness. Gradually the voice became real, the arms a person. A slight smile curved his mouth. It had been Jim - holding him, calling him back. A faint doubt, a nagging question. Why had Jim been holding him? Against what? What was his voice calling him back from?

He opened his eyes and looked around the unfamiliar room. Where was he, and where was Jim? He thought back. The Enterprise, the transporter room, they were on Aluria. He started up as an electric shock of horror ran through him. Rui Fever! He had had Rui Fever!

A cry was torn from him. "Jim!" He was at the door, outside, then froze in disbelief, staring at the man slowly walking back from the lake.

Kirk was white, with deep stains of exhaustion on his face, his eyes huge shadows of pain. A rough blood-soaked bandage circled his head, his left arm hung limply by his side, another bloodstained bandage around his shoulder.

A slow realization came to Spock, a twisting somewhere inside. He had done that. He had... hurt his Captain. He would have died, willingly, now. Kirk had been exposed to the Fever, and without the anti-toxin...

Kirk swayed, and without knowing he moved, Spock was at his side, hands on the Captain's shoulders.

"Jim!"

The Captain looked up, and a smile of joy lit his face. "Spock! The Fever - it's over! Are you all right now? Really all right?"

Spock nodded slowly, his eyes intent on Kirk's face. "Jim, why did you come here? Do you know what you've done? You should have stayed away!"

Kirk grinned at the Vulcan. "I thought you'd object, so I prepared! It was only... logical... that I come. You had only a 3% chance if I didn't, a 46.5% chance if I did. If I get the Fever on the earliest day possible, the Enterprise is due back before the end of the sickness. Even if they don't get back in time, I still have an 18.8% chance to make it. Do I have the figures straight, Mr. Spock?"

Spock didn't answer. He examined the head injury, the arm, and silently re-banded both.

"How did these happen, Captain?" He was sure he knew, but there was a possibility... Kirk's silence confirmed his fears.

"They happened during the violent periods." A thread of agony crept into Spock's voice. "Jim, the percentages you quoted were correct - for an initially healthy man, not for someone who has gone through what you have. Did you get any sleep at all? I doubt it, from the way you look."

His voice broke, and he visibly gathered control. "That head injury looks serious. I can't tell how bad the arm is, but the combination of the two, plus the exhaustion is - could be - very serious."

Kirk smiled gently at him. "Spock, I knew before I came that I'd be tired, maybe hurt, but I had to come. Maybe it wasn't logical - I know it wasn't, that it was emotional - but I couldn't just let you die." The smile became a

grin. "Besides, it'll be at least two days before the Fever's due to hit. I'll spend the time resting and get some strength back." There was a moment of silence. "Are you sure you're all right? You were very... ill... for a while."

Spock stared at Kirk. Eight days? He quickly reviewed what he knew of the Fever, and his face grew hard as he realised what Kirk had done.

He saw the Captain regarding him anxiously, and forced himself to smile back. "I'm fine, Jim. The coma-like sleep is something like the Vulcan healing trance. Captain, during those eight days - what did you eat?"

Kirk waved his hand wearily. "Food concentrates from the belt pouches. The Alurians are... afraid to come near the cabin. I guess you can't really blame them. I was afraid to leave you long enough to look for food." He smiled up at the Vulcan. "Don't be too worried. You know that McCoy says he can't tell which one of us is the more stubborn, and you made it against longer odds than I have against me."

He waited for Spock's face to soften in response, then closed his eyes and was asleep.

Spock stood looking at his Captain for an eternity of time. Yes, Kirk had known what he was doing, what could happen, and still... Now, if only the Fever held off, came on the last day instead of the first. But he couldn't chance it. In his weakened condition Jim was going to be lucky if the incubation period wasn't shortened. He shook his head. No. What was that Earth saying? 'No sense borrowing trouble', that was it. Sometimes these Humans came up with some sense!

There was little he could do except finish Kirk's own preparations and check around for some food, maybe some herbs to help handle the Fever he knew was coming. He stacked the wood for the fireplace and brought back the bucket of water, then went outside to look around. He remembered the description of a native herb that was effective in reducing fever, but couldn't find any in the area they were in. For a moment he thought about leaving the cabin and going back to the Alurians for it, but then decided not to. If Kirk woke up while he was gone the Captain would probably come looking for him.

He found some plants that he knew were edible, and boiled them in some of the water, using the bucket for a pot. When he ate them he could not refrain from making a grimace of distaste. Too bad - Jim would never be able to eat these. He had to get some solid food in him before the Fever struck. But for now, all there was to do was wait.

A Human would have gone slightly mad with the wait, but Spock simply spent the time meditating. Jim slept through the afternoon, the night, and into the next day. Spock was thankful he hadn't gone for the herbs, as Kirk would occasionally start awake and look around for Spock. The Vulcan shuddered when he thought of the illogical actions the Captain would probably have taken if he had woken up one of those times and found Spock gone.

When the Captain finally stirred and woke up, Spock stood and went over to him. "How do you feel now, Captain?"

Kirk stretched. "Fine, Mr. Spock." He swung his legs over the side of the bed and started to get up.

Spock eyed him doubtfully. He certainly didn't look fine. His face was still white, and his eyes still deeply shadowed.

"Jim, do you think you should get up? Perhaps it would be better if you spent the time in bed."

Kirk grinned at him. "Negative, Mr. Spock. I'm no Vulcan, although there are times when I wish I were! I'd go crazy just lying there with nothing to do."

He stood up and walked to the door. A small frown drew Spock's slanting eyebrows together as he noticed the Captain's arm still hung limply.

The Captain leaned against the door. "It's going to be a beautiful day. Too bad the Rui Fever had to spoil this time. I was looking forward to you taking over the negotiations and getting in..." A speculative look came on his face as he eyed the small lake. He glanced at Spock. "Do you fish, Mr. Spock?"

The Vulcan's face grew, if possible, even more impassive. "Fish? You mean that Human custom of taking a branch, a bent piece of thin metal, some cord, and using them to pit your strength against a creature ~~that~~ has less than 1% of your weight? No, Captain, I do not fish!"

"Stupid of me - I should have known better," Kirk grinned. "Come on - it's about time you learned."

Spock watched as Kirk went happily towards a group of tree-like plants in search of a pole. Then the Vulcan started forward, a strange expression coming on his face. Kirk had found the branch he wanted, and was awkwardly trying to break it off, using only one hand. Spock felt an emptiness somewhere deep inside. If the Captain's arm was permanently injured, if he lost the use...

No! He was 'borrowing trouble' again. He went up to the Captain and quietly cut off the branch.

"Is this what you wanted?"

Kirk grinned at him, a twinkle in his eyes. "Yes. Now, if you can find another one like that, I think I saw some cord and 'thin metal' we can make into hooks."

He went towards the cabin, whistling cheerfully. Spock watched him out of sight, and came to a decision. This... fishing... could have two valuable results: keeping the Captain quietly occupied, and possibly supplying some solid food for him. Therefore, it would be logical to participate in the task. He found another stick, then, under Kirk's direction, fashioned the metal into hooks. Soon they had assembled two fishing poles, and were ready to try their luck.

The Captain grinned at Spock. "Now, the bait. See if you can find - I guess they don't have worms - some bugs, or whatever you think fish would eat."

Spock looked at him. "Not being a fish, I cannot imagine what they might eat. However, I would much prefer putting a piece of a plant on one of these ... hooks... rather than a living creature."

With that he got up, walked around the edge of the pond, then returned with a handful of small seeds, rather like Earth peas. "It seems that these fall into the water. Perhaps they would do."

Kirk nodded, and within minutes was sitting happily by the edge of the water, leaning back against a tree, humming as he threw his line out. Spock glanced at him and then, with an expression of distaste, threw out his own line.

For a while there was silence, then Spock asked, "And what do I do if one of the fish decided to eat the seed?"

"Do? Pull it in, of course! Hey! I think I have one! Watch me!"

Spock watched the pole bend, then Kirk gave a heave. The fish came flying straight at Spock, who barely managed to duck out of the way.

Kirk knelt by the fish, a grin on his face. "Sorry about that! It's supposed to come up slower, but with this arm..." He glanced up, quickly wishing he had not said those words. He caught a quick glimpse of pain in Spock's eyes, then the veil was drawn over them.

He said gently, "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that."

Dark eyes met hazel in a moment of silence. Kirk read the thinly-veiled pain, the self reproach, in the Vulcan's eyes. The tension was broken by the sudden bending of Spock's rod.

The Vulcan looked at the rod with distaste, but was secretly glad of the diversion. With great ease he flipped the fish out and quickly removed the hook.

Kirk laughed. "You'd make a good fisherman, if you wanted to." A hint of wistfulness came into his voice. "I know a lake, close to where I grew up, there there are bass a foot long. I wish I could bring you there sometime."

Spock's eyes darkened slightly, then Kirk grinned. "Come on, I'll show you how to cook these over the fire. It's too bad you won't eat some, but since you won't there's no sense catching any more."

Kirk cleaned and cooked the fish, and Spock boiled some more of the plants he had found. After they had eaten they sat outside, leaning against the wall, watching the day turn slowly into night.

Spock wondered what had really happened during those eight days, but knew he would never find out. Kirk would never tell him. He remembered again the arms holding him, the voice calling him...

Kirk's voice interrupted his thoughts. "It's funny, but every time I'm on a new planet, and look up at the stars, I always expect to see the same ones I saw on Earth as a boy. And I'm always surprised when they're different."

There was silence for a while, then Kirk stood up and stretched. "I'm tired. I think I'll go in and get some sleep."

Spock stood up with him. "Jim, is there any feeling at all in your arm?" He added quickly, "Please do not think that I am just being inquisitive. Dr. McCoy might want to know, and with the Rui Fever..."

Kirk swung his head around. He could see very little except a dim outline. He answered slowly, "Not... really. The whole arm is sort of... numb. Tingling, like when your foot's asleep." He added gently, "Don't be too concerned. It's probably just a... a nerve bruise, or something."

Spock watched the Captain move across the room. "How did it happen?"

Kirk looked at the dim outline. Sometimes the wondering was worse than the knowing. "During one of the periods of violence, you... I was hit with a piece of firewood. High up, near the shoulder."

He watched Spock carefully for some sign, but could see no movement. He sighed softly, "Goodnight, Mr. Spock," and lay down on the bed. He knew better than to suggest they share it.

Spock stood silently for a while, then went over to the fireplace and stirred the fire. In the flickering light his face was stern, marble-like. He held a piece of wood in his hands for a moment, then, with a quick surge of strength, snapped it in two.

A soft voice. "It wasn't your fault, any more than it was the fault of the wood. It was the Fever."

Spock stiffened, then slowly turned. "That, Captain, is logical. However, the longer I am with Humans, the more I find that there are some things that are not - quite - logical."

He went over to the bed and checked the Captain's covers, then lay down on the floor. In a short while there was silence.

When Spock woke at first light he looked at the sleeping man. Kirk looked better this morning. The whiteness was nearly gone. If only the Fever would hold off.

The Vulcan walked over to the door and looked out, his glance falling on

the two poles. He heard a sound and turned around. Jim was standing by the bed, starting towards him. Yes, he definitely looked better, and the arm was no longer quite so limp.

Kirk smiled. "Good morning. Um, beautiful day! Too bad there's nothing to do but fish!" He threw a mischevious glance at Spock, then grabbed the poles and headed towards the lake.

He called back over his shoulder, "By the way, I think I was right - about my arm, that is. There's feeling back in it today, and I can move it some."

Spock stood still for a moment, thankfulness welling up inside, then followed the Captain to the lake. He could not understand how Humans could spend so much time and energy in catching a fish! He was quite sure that the Captain could easily spend the entire day sitting with a hook in the water, and if he caught a few fish, consider the time well spent. Well, at least it would allow him to get some rest, and Spock to meditate.

The fishing was slow, and Spock was soon deep in thought. A motion, out of place, caught his eye, and he glanced towards Kirk. Then he was on his feet, moving towards the Captain. The Fever had not held off. Kirk's face was flushed, a grimace of pain passed over it, quickly suppressed when he saw Spock moving towards him.

The Captain smiled. "We still have a day's leeway for the Enterprise to get back." He tried to stand, but a sudden shudder shook him, and he fell back down to the ground. Spock stooped, and in one quick, fluid motion picked him up and carried him to the cabin.

Spock long remembered every moment of the next few days - the increasing fever, the intense pain, the weakness that spread through the Captain until the slightest movement was an effort. As the pain increased it became more and more difficult for Kirk to stop the moans that rose behind tightly-closed lips.

"Captain, there is no need to maintain control. It simply further weakens you, uses strength that you will presently need. There is no-one else here."

"You... would not... give up... control. Neither will I."

Spock's face softened. "That is illogical. I am a Vulcan, you are not. Perhaps, if you will allow it, I can help. The mindmeld..."

A flicker of hope appeared briefly on Kirk's face, and he nodded. Spock palced his fingers on Kirk's head and concentrated. After a few moments he removed them.

"I cannot. There seems to be a barrier, probably created by the Fever."

Kirk nodded wearily and closed his eyes. The Vulcan tightened his lips; he had counted on the mindmeld to help relieve the pain. Now he was completely helpless. Spock did not like the feeling, particularly when it was his Captain who needed the help.

The pain increased and the Fever mounted higher. Kirk drifted in and out of consciousness. Time passed. Minutes turned into hours, hours into days. A knot in Spock's stomach grew harder and tighter as his concern mounted.

The firewood grew low, and Spock considered briefly the risk of leaving Kirk for a few minutes. He had to get more wood; the chills had not yet started, but when they did he would have to be kept warm. He looked speculatively at the still figure on the bed. The Captain seemed to be resting, and he decided to take a chance.

It took somewhat longer than he had anticipated. The wood near the cabin had already been gathered up, and he had to go further away than he liked. He hurried back, a vague feeling of disquiet moving his feet rapidly. When he

entered the cabin the wood cascaded from his arms as he leaped to the bed.

Kirk was frantically trying to raise himself on one elbow, his chest heaving with great gasps for air. He looked toward Spock, fear in his eyes.

"I... can't... breathe..."

Spock raised the Captain's shoulders up and gradually his breathing grew easier. When the Vulcan was certain Kirk was again breathing normally, he laid him back down on the bed, stood, and frowned down at him, deep in thought. He quickly gathered the firewood, dropping it by the fireplace, and added a few pieces to the fire.

The harsh gasps started again. Spock whirled and was at Kirk's side, again lifting him up. This time he sat down on the bed, leaned back against the wall, and carefully drew Kirk close, turning him slightly towards him. Gradually the Captain's breathing grew easier, and he soon lay quietly in Spock's arms.

"It is as I feared. When you lie down, the breathing passages become clogged. It is only when you are raised up that you can breathe properly."

Kirk lay unresisting in Spock's arms, his head on the Vulcan's shoulder; then he tried to pull away. Spock drew him gently back.

"Spock, you can't hold me until the Enterprise comes! There must be something around here that can be used to prop me up."

A strange expression stole across the Vulcan's face. Tenderness? Love? Grim determination, certainly.

"There is nothing, Captain. I looked when I went outside. The firewood is a possibility, but that which I have here is rotten and would fall apart under your weight. I dare not leave you long enough to cut green wood. There is no other way. I can, and will, keep you raised for as long as necessary."

The Captain stopped protesting. Little was said. Spock did not want to weaken the Captain by unnecessary conversation, and Kirk didn't have the strength for it.

Night came, and with it the chills. Long shudders shook Kirk, convulsions of chill and increasing pain. Spock had never felt more helpless in his entire life. There was absolutely nothing he could do, except hold Kirk, letting the higher temperature of his body help warm the Captain as much as possible. An occasional moan was torn from behind the Captain's tightly-closed lips, and each one was a knife in Spock's heart.

Finally the day came, the fourth day, the day the Enterprise was due to return. The chills died away, but occasional shudders would still shake Kirk. While the pain seemed to lessen, the weakness increased. The tension grew, each waiting for the buzz of the communicator that would signal the return of the Enterprise.

The day passed slowly. There was only one brief conversation.

Kirk asked, "Spock?"

"Yes, Captain?"

"Do you remember the tape? The one I left for you and McCoy? The one you didn't listen to?"

Very slowly. "Yes... Captain."

"If... something happens... remember it then. I don't want the Enterprise commanded by anyone but the best, and you are... the best."

Spock's arms tightened suddenly, the knot inside twisted, but he said nothing. He could not waste the Captain's strength in useless denial of what they both knew to be a possibility.

"Yes, Captain."

And again there was silence.

Night came again. The convulsive chills of the night before were gone, but Kirk still trembled with pain.

Once, Spock asked, "Jim, the pain - is it very bad?" His face twisted at the answer.

"Not really. It's... just there. Part of me... now. If I don't... fight, just... float with it... it's easier."

Kirk's strength was gone. He lay limply in Spock's arms. The Vulcan felt a void slowly start to empty somewhere deep inside. He realised that if Kirk died, the emptiness would never be filled. For the first time he understood how Humans could be angry at events they could not control. He drew Kirk closer to him.

The Captain felt the movement, and understood. "Spock, don't worry. The Enterprise will come. But - if it doesn't - I knew the odds, it was my choice to come. You couldn't stop me. Don't take any blame on yourself."

An agonised whisper was torn from Spock. "I... will not. But... I cannot help! I can do... nothing! Not even ease your pain."

Morning arrived. Kirk stirred and whispered, "Spock, would you... do you mind... taking me outside? I... would rather not... die in here."

The Vulcan's arms tightened briefly, a flame leaped in his eyes. He carefully gathered Kirk up, grabbing a blanket with one hand. He carried him outside, down to the edge of the lake, laid him on the blanket, then sat leaning against a tree, the Captain resting back on him. They watched the lake glinting in the sun.

Kirk felt a peace steal over him. He rested a hand on the strong arm encircling him. "Spock?"

"Yes, Jim?" A quiet voice, a tenderness seldom heard.

"We've had... some good... times together... my brother."

The arms slowly tightened, the dark head bent protectively over Kirk's

The Captain's voice grew gentle, dreaming. "Brother, friend - and more. I... wish... I could have shown you... that.. lake..."

His voice died away as his eyes closed. The arms held him close, dark hair mingling with brown. They sat quietly as the rising sun chased the silver from the lake.

Kirk felt hands on his arms, shaking him, a voice calling him from a distance.

Jim! Jim! Spock, see if you can reach him. The anti-toxin should have worked by now."

It was too hard to respond. It was so quiet resting here. Then another voice, urgent, impossible to resist.

"Captain! Jim! You're back on the Enterprise." Then quietly, "Brother!"

He opened his eyes and looked up into Spock's face, and saw the flames leap in their inner depths before the veil was drawn.

McCoy burst out, "It's about time! Sometimes your stubbornness works in reverse. You fought the anti-toxin as hard as you fought the Fever." He examined the medical scanner. "We beamed down minutes after you passed out. Funny..."

Kirk looked at the doctor, puzzled. "Funny? What's funny?"

McCoy glanced from Kirk to the impassive Vulcan. He would never forget that sight. The Alurians had contacted them and told them about the disease. He had beamed down with the anti-toxin ready. The two of them were sitting by the lake, Spock holding Kirk in his arms, carefully, protectively. He decided

that this was one thing he would not tease Spock about. It was private.

"Nothing. I wish you two would stop getting into trouble! One of these days I'm not going to be able to patch you up."

Spock looked quizzically at McCoy. "Considering what your medications tend to do to my stomach, that might be a blessing."

The doctor opened his mouth to retort, but was prevented from doing so by the intercom.

"Scott here. There's a message coming in from Starfleet Command, Mr. Spock."

"Coming, Mr. Scott." He looked at the Captain. "The trade negotiations will be conducted by the regular Delegates. They were late getting to Starbase 14. That is why the Enterprise was delayed."

McCoy shook his head irritably and walked towards some equipment. "One of these days I'm going to get the last word again!" He glanced quickly at the two and turned away, a smile on his face.

Kirk grinned. "The gamble paid off, but next time maybe I'd better arrange a larger margin of safety."

"That would be wise. The doctor informs me that there was little time left." He looked at the Captain. "Jim. That lake on Earth. Perhaps..."

Kirk's eyebrows rose in fair imitation of the Vulcan's at his most exasperating. "Don't tell me you've decided to become a fisherman!"

A decisive shake of the head. "Negative. But, I would like to see some of those 'foot-long bass'. Purely for scientific reasons, you understand."

Two pairs of eyes met and held. "Mr. Spock, I would be honored."

The Vulcan continued, his manner almost one of embarrassment, "Captain, about what happened on Aluria..."

Kirk interrupted, "I seem to have developed another attribute of Ruid Fever, Mr. Spock. I can't seem to remember much of what happened."

The slanting eyebrow rose, then Spock nodded. "I must go to the Bridge now and see about that message from Starfleet."

Their gazes locked for a moment, then the Vulcan turned and left the room. Kirk settled back and closed his eyes, a slight smile on his face. Then he slept.

MR. SPOCK - SUGAR by Ann Smith

Just as in winter... a hint of spring,
Thoughts are hidden.
Just now and then... a wondrous thing,
Behind the Vulcan cold reserve...
The walled heart reveals...
A love... pure... unending...
That brings me close to tears.

I'm not sure that I know you,
Only what I've seen.
Beyond the mask that hides you,
A face not so serene.

Dear Mr. Spock,

thank you for the birthday present. I always wanted a book on Vulcan philosophy - but not very much.

Yours, *Mr. McCoy*

AN EXTRAORDINARY DAY IN THE LIFE OF... by Lesley Walker

or,

PAWS FOR THOUGHT

(Another thrilling installment of the inter-galactic saga of that girl-about-galaxy, Lee Sawyer.)

"How do you feel?"

"Terrified!"

"Aw, come on, it's not that bad!"

"Then YOU tell the Captain who broke his chair!"

Yes, Gentlebeings, it's me again, the super-cool, efficient, controlled ex-Ensign, recently-promoted-to-Lieutenant, Lee Sawyer, modestly reluctant (or so it says here in my press release...)

You may have gathered that a few things have happened to me since last we met, and seeing as how I'm not pushed for time, I'll fill you in on what has been happening to moi et mes camarades. Also, it will explain, to some extent, the reason for my presence at the Captain's little soiree the other night.

Yes, it was a 'Meet-the-folks-from-Tarun-Ceti-time', and time for laughing maniacally at jokes that even a rabid hyena would find hard to smile at. It was also an occasion of 'Be-nice-to-the-folks-from-Tarun-Ceti-even-when-they-do-naughty-things-on-your-thousand-credit-a-square-meter-carpet'. In other words, it was a VIP reception, and yours truly appeared at the request (for request read ORDER) of our noble figure-head - no, not Spock, silly! - the good Captain. It is all a part of the job. (Is it? No-one told me that Starfleet were trying to garotte half their senior staff by making them wear Dress Uniforms.) Again, Starfleet do not advertise this fact; if they did, I feel sure their ad would read as follows :

"JOIN STARFLEET - DEFORM YOUR OESOPHOGUS"

Mind you, Scotty looked superb - it's the tartan that does it - and he has better knees than I have, anyway.

Dr. McCoy looked like a squirming captured rabbit caught in a trapper's bag trying desperately to escape. In other words, I am not alone in my opinion of Dress Uniform.

Uhura was given the option of not wearing a uniform (seniority has its compensations) and looked devastatingly beautiful in a long, flowing, swirling, ultra-feminine gown that knocked everyone's eyes out - alas, I did not win 'BEST-DRESSED FEMALE OF THE EVENING' that night.

Mr. Spock looked like Mr. Spock - cool, impassive, refined, with that unmistakable air of serene dignity - and that tantalising air of seductive alienness... need I say more? (Dare I say more?)

And lastly, but not leastly, the Captain, who looked - this part isn't easy to say (especially for him) - as if his tunic had given up trying to fit where no uniform has fitted before, or ever will, if he doesn't give up those pieces of chocolate gateau he is so partial to. Never mind, a good diet of 2 calories a day and 24 hours gym practice, and I'm sure he'll regain his former sylph-like figure.

But I almost forgot... me. Well, I looked a real moron in my D.U. (Damned Uncomfortable); the collar was too high, too tight, too starched, and the body was cut to fit an old-Earth African pygmy - it certainly wasn't cut to fit me. My head, hands and legs appeared to have been attached to the collar, cuffs and hem of my uniform, and seemed to have complete independence from my torso. However, as I do not possess a gown - or even a bathrobe for that matter - to rival those of Ms. Uhura, I opted (coward!) for the D.U., which can only be described as living agony.

But I digress. I said I was going to fill you in on my promotion. Well, there I was on duty in the Engine Room (Scotty's pride and joy), and the Captain just happened to be touring in the vicinity during a routine efficiency rating check, when suddenly KERRUNNOCHH! - half the Engine Control panel collapsed in a red-hot shower of sparks, heaving vast amounts of debris in the general direction of the Captain's extremely valuable person. Being of an heroic temperament, and of fast-witted action, I assessed the situation in an instant, saw the imminent danger to the Captain, and in a death-defying, no-holds-barred leap, threw myself at his body to knock him out of the way, saw to his safety, and quickly leaped back and switched off the Control Panel, thereby averting disaster to both Enterprise and Captain. This, having saved Jim Kirk's two major loves(!) - but not necessarily in order of preference - in a gesture of undying gratitude for my heroic and exceptionally well-timed action, he promoted me.

Now I'll tell you what really happened.

The Enterprise made one of its routine calls at a Starbase - Starbase 4, to be precise - to offload (read ABANDON) some weary crew on Shore Leave, and to pick up supplies. Raddy (Radcliffe - remember him?) and I decided to go on leave together and finally wound up in - for want of a better word - a local bar.

Raddy and I were sitting quietly in a darkened corner, imbibing vast amounts of alcohol (Ancezeran Eye-Crossers, I believe), when suddenly Raddy, raving like a man possessed, raging and glassy-eyed, promptly departed my company (how rude! Must have been my perfume) and zeroed in on a seductive Starbase yeoman draped alluringly over a seat at the bar.

Having seen Raddy's previous encounters with l'affaires d'amour, I was not overly concerned with this sudden departure, nor his subsequent attack of inane stupidity and generally making a fool of himself while slavering at the mouth over Gloria (this, apparently, was the name of the object of his new grande passione.) I, having realised that there was no way he would be even remotely interested in a game of tri-dimensional chess, decided to take my leave of Raddy and his new objet d'amour - and also of the rather large bar tab he and I had managed to accumulate.

I didn't see Raddy for a couple of days, but he finally emerged looking wan and somewhat pale, bursting with enthusiasm and wearing a silly-looking grin that could mean only one thing - Raddy was in love (sigh!).

"Guess what?" says he.

"No, you tell me," says I.

"I'm engaged to be married."

"WHAT!"

"I'm leaving the Enterprise - it's all arranged - and I'm being posted to Starbase 4 to be with (sigh) Gloria..."

I gave Raddy my best wishes, a snarl, and then a black eye.

However, when I finally managed to simmer down (after much persuasion from Uhura), I was enticed into partaking of Raddy's farewell party, where, needless to say, the Saurian brandy flowed like treacle, but the four casks of wine we bought on Vargus 6 for 10 credits the lot, flowed like water.

And thus we bade adieu to Raddy and his new-found love... six or seven times that one night, as I remember - vaguely.

The next morning, complete with nuclear warfare in my head, I was summoned to the Captain's omnipresence.

"Ensign Sawyer, you will no doubt be aware of the vacancy that has recently occurred in your department?"

"Yesshir." (Whoops - hope he didn't notice that little slur, or the little

wince of agony as he spoke.)

"And that you are not without some considerable - aah - experience in E.C.T.?"

"Yesshir, Captain, thatsh very true, shir." (I don't think he noticed that little stumble, or the pretence of being able to stand on two feet.)

"Well, Ensign, on the recommendation of your Section Chief, Mr. Scott, I am putting you forward to Starfleet Command for promotion to the position of Lieutenant."

"Oh, thatsh nice, shir."

"Well, aren't you pleased?"

"Huh? Pleashed? Yesshir, of courshe shir. Exchushe me, shir... but can I please be excushed?"

"What? Yes - yes of course! Dismissed."

"Thanksh sho muscchh, shir..."

"Oh, and Ensign..."

"Yesshir?"

"Ask Dr. McCoy for his hangover remedy - never fails!"

"Hic!" (An expression of inebriation, not to be confused with the Latin 'hic, haec, hoc'.)

And that, in a nutshell, is the story of my promotion.

And that is also the story of how I became invited to the Captain's shindig for the Tarun Ceti Ambassadorial Committee.

Members of the Tarun Ceti race are quite pleasant, physically - they facially resemble Earth's fox, are bipedal, have beautiful russet-coloured body hair, large bushy tails, and huge gentle eyes. They are very shy, timid people but - according to one Rav-Anar, the Andorian Emissary to Tarun Ceti - be sure to lay down plenty of old rags on the floor when expecting to entertain a Tarun Ceti party, as they have a tendency to revert to their ancestral behaviour when excited. I have since noticed that Rav-Anar was not present at the reception. Methinks thereby hangs a tale. (Bow-bow - how awful! Couldn't resist that one, I'm afraid.)

Chekov, our resident (half) wit and attempted (but failed) humourist, was noted to have said at the time of the reception that we should have held the soiree in the ship's forest-garden, in order not only to make the Tarun Ceti committee feel more at home, but to economise on cleaning bills, the cost of rags, and embarrassment to all. Mr. Chekov is not noted for his tact or diplomacy - neither was he invited to the Captain's reception, which was a bone of contention for weeks to come. (Sorry, it just sort of slipped in...)

So, to cut what would be a long, non-eventful story short, the reception was, apart from a few initial embarrassing silences, a great success, and the Tarun Ceti committee have since contacted Starfleet Command from their final destination of Benovas, a newly colonised planetoid just outside the Andorian sector of the galaxy, and informed them of their great pleasure at meeting Captain Kirk and his 'very attractive female crew members'. (Quoted straight from the text.) Seeing as how Uhura, myself and Christine Chapel were the only females present, and seeing as both Chris and I were wearing our delightful (!) Dress Uniforms, I can only think that the remark applies to my superior - in more ways than one - Uhura. Oh well, I hope I get the chance to wear something more exclusive next time.

One thing I forgot to mention was the briefing the Captain gave us before the reception. It went something like this.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen, this evening we will be meeting with some of the most sensitive and valuable potential members of the Federation, namely

the Tarun Ceti Ambassadorial Committee. Firstly, I cannot stress too highly the importance of this evening - whatever impression we make on the Tarun Ceti committee goes with them back to Benovas, and decides if they are in or out. I would very much like them to be 'in'. Your attitudes, behaviour and manners will all be an influence on their decision, and so I must therefore stress the necessity of refraining from standing on their sensitive prehensile tails..."

Someone giggled at this point - I utterly deny that it was me!

"As I was saying, refrain from standing on their SENSITIVE prehensile tails... Sawyer, are you paying attention?"

"Wha - me - yes, yes sir, of course, sir!"

"Then what did I just say?"

"Something about keeping my feet away from their sensitive tails, sir."

"Well, you're right this time. Do you know what 'prehensile' means, Sawyer?"

"It means I don't gawk, screech, or otherwise draw attention to the fact that the Ambassador just picked up a glass with his tail, sir."

"Got it in one, Sawyer."

"Thank you, sir."

He then rambled on for hours (or so it seemed) about tact, courtesy, minding our P's and Q's, and finally wound up by saying,

"But remember, everybody, just be yourselves."

Someone giggled again, and this time it was me.

"Lieutenant, sometimes I question the wisdom of promoting you. You seem a little immature to be coping the responsible position you are in."

"Sir???"

"Would you please refrain from giggling in that - aah - schoolgirl manner, and behave more like a senior member of staff."

"But... but sir..."

"And one other thing - Happy Birthday, Lieutenant!"

"Pardon?"

"I said, 'Happy Birthday, Lieutenant'. Well, today is your birthday, isn't it?"

"Ya- ya- yes, sir, it is."

A wink at Uhura told me who the little bird was. Maybe that little bird will get some extra bird seed one day...

"Well, tonight will be a double celebration, providing, of course, you can behave yourself."

"Yes, sir. I promise not to throw jelly at the Ambassador, sir."

"Glad to hear it, Lieutenant. I hope 27 is sufficiently mature to behave in an acceptable fashion."

"Er... it's 26 actually, sir."

"Wassat? 26? Beg your pardon, Ms. Sawyer. Anyhow, just remember WHO you are and WHERE you are this evening, and we should all have a great time."

"Thank you, sir."

"Okay, everyone, dismissed. See you all at the reception at 19:45 hours." With a wave of his hand he dismissed everyone present - with the exception of one person; guess who that was....?

"Ah - Lieutenant Sawyer, would you mind remaining behind for a moment, please?"

Now what had I done?

"Yes, sir?"

"Don't take too much to heart what I said earlier. Even Starship Captains have to joke now and again - it helps relieve the monotony. Anyway, I really wanted to say 'Congratulations' on your successful promotion, and once again, Happy Birthday, Lee."

"Thank you. Thank you very much, sir. I certainly intend to do my best, both tonight and for the rest of my career."

"Good girl. Now get moving or we'll all be late, won't we?"

"Aye aye, Captain!"

It certainly proves that Starship Captains aren't all blood and thunder - ours certainly isn't. He's really an old softy, and I guess it's the knowledge that he has a heart of gold under his gold shirt that makes us all so eager to work to our fullest capacity for him.

Anyway, we certainly impressed the Tarun Ceti committee that evening, both with our manners and with our celebration. (Captain Kirk tactfully refrained from informing the Tarun Ceti Ambassador that my jolly enthusiasm was mainly due to the fact that I have a predilection for becoming inebriated at the drop of a hat - especially a hat full of Saurian brandy...)

However, I do have a little secret to divulge - and I can now reveal all, seeing as how the Tarun Ceti committee are far, far away.

In preparation for the evening's events, rather than having cumbersome hand-held translators waved under the Committee's noses, it was decided that we in ECT (for 'we' read 'Sawyer') should fix up the P.A. system in the VIP lounge with auto-translation facilities - I mean, it looks far better than waving a hand-held device in one hand whilst attempting to balance a plate of petit-fours and a glass of something nice in the other. So, duly elected, and duly ordered by our revered Captain (!), I inserted myself into the VIP lounge at 17.45 hours - 2 hours is more than enough to effect a simple circuit re-wiring.

Anyway, 19.45 hours inevitably arrived, and we escorted (or should I say herded) the VIP's into their reception. The hand-held translators were discarded, Captain Kirk throwing me a confident look in the secure knowledge that the sensors in the PA system would pick up his every word, whisper or sigh and translate it immediately.

Unfortunately, not only did the sensors pick up his every word, they also picked up everyone else's words, including some not-so-pleasant remarks about the buffet the Enterprise had provided. Albeit that the complaints were from Dr. McCoy, it still did not present a convincing image of unity for the Tarun Ceti Ambassador to hear the barrage of impotent fury Dr. McCoy was heaving at the sausage rolls; and neither did the comments a certain Chief Engineer was making about the length of a certain Chief Nurse's legs - and all of this perfectly and instantaneously translated into fluent Tarun Ceti.

Upon witnessing this excruciatingly embarrassing scene (and several others beside) I began nervously fidgetting in my corner and surreptitiously made lunges toward the door in an attempt to escape the inevitable onslaught of derisive ridicule (or worse) from a beet-coloured Captain. Then, before I knew it, there he was, on target and heading straight for me. You really are gonna get it now, Sawyer!

The Captain stood approximately six inches away from my ear, and I could feel his breath searing great holes in my Dress Uniform - Boy, was he mad!

"Sawyer," he breathed menacingly, "a word outside, if you don't mind."

"Ah, er, er, yes, sir," I whispered back, not in blood-boiling anger but in pure terror! There was I, barely promoted, about to be stripped of my rank, possibly my career... Argh! Where did I go wrong? What did I ever do to deserve such a fate?

I watched the Captain's form disappear through the Lounge doors and, plucking up every gramme of courage I possessed (which at this point would not have weighed more than a marshmallow) I followed suit. To say I was quaking in fear would be a mild comment. I emerged through the doors with my eyes firmly shut, and the air in my lungs from what was possibly my last breath in this life...

"Sawyer, I hold you personally responsible for this! You have exactly 30 seconds to get in there and do something about it!"

"But... but sir..."

"No excuses, Sawyer - get it fixed, and FAST. Dismissed."

And with that parting remark he turned on his heel and disappeared through the Lounge doors, obviously to make some diplomatic remark about a 'slight technical hitch', and to inform the committee that all would be rectified. I wish someone could have told me too...

However, not to be cast down, I pulled myself together and headed towards ECT. On the way I mulled things over and got my thoughts together, and by the time I returned to the VIP lounge, no-one would have recognised the feeble, pathetic creature and the figure of composure that now replaced her as being the same person.

With my trusty little black pouch, in I stepped into a semi Tower of Babel. There was a constant drone of babble - from English to Tarun Ceti (which sounded like a lot of snorts, sniffs and grunts), and from Tarun Ceti into English (which sounded like the Ambassador's party were just as embarrassed about this - ahem - mix up as I was.)

Managing to avoid a caustic stare from the Captain I marched confidently up to one of the access panels to the PA system, unlatched the front, and stuck in my probe, all the while under the beady eye of one very unimpressed Starship Commander. Spock had his unreadable mask of the Ultimate Vulcan on his face - thank goodness. At least he would only make professional criticism... I hope. With my heart in my mouth and a blood pressure that would have impressed even the most hardened physician, I made my final adjustments... and stepped back.

Silence. Everyone had stopped talking. This was the one time I needed someone to talk and they all stopped. How typical. Braving a cold cutting glance from the Captain, I faced him and moved to speak.

"Captain, would you please commence your formal speech of welcome?"

The PA sensors picked up my words, churned them out... but did not pick up the murmur of dissent I noticed from the rear quarters around Dr. McCoy's area.

Kirk, the muscles in his jaw working 50 to the dozen, opened his mouth and spoke.

"Welcome, friends from Tarun Ceti, to our small gathering here tonight to honour your presence aboard our vessel. We have great pleasure in..."

It worked! The sensor was only picking up one person at a time, (thanks to my programming) and was neatly translating back and forth from English to Tarun Ceti and vice-versa. I managed a small grin of congratulation to myself, as I felt very very sure that I would receive none whatsoever from any of my superiors, and replaced the PA panel.

The Tarun Ceti Ambassador gave his speech of acceptance, and it came out translated into beautiful English - much to the relief of all present, but most especially the cringing heap of female Lieutenant Sawyer standing by the

Saurian brandy in the corner.

However, the evening, after such a near-disaster of a start, picked up and proceeded to turn into one of the best social gatherings I have attended in a long time, except for Raddy's farewell party, and that's only a vague memory anyway. Indeed, the Tarun Ceti committee were so impressed by the Enterprise and the Federation that upon arrival at Benovas they made immediate application to become a member planet of the UFP. Three cheers for us, I say.

Oh yes, you'd like to know how I fared, wouldn't you? Well, wouldn't you? Well, after about 2 hours and 6 glasses of Saurian brandy (on my part) and a pep talk from Uhura (she was rooting for me all along, bless her), the Captain finally managed to walk over to my part of the lounge. As the famous saying goes, here goes nothing...

"Lieutenant, may I speak with you for a moment?"

"Sir?"

"You did a fine job in repairing the system so quickly..."

"Oh, it was nothing, sir..." I interrupted.

"Let me finish, Sawyer."

"Sorry, sir. Jumped the gun a bit, didn't I?"

He ignored that remark. "I would like once again to say that you did a fine job in repairing that system, but let me tell you, if anything like that ever happens to me again, I promise you that I will be extremely displeased. But don't let that spoil your evening. Carry on Lieutenant."

He turned crisply away and left me in a wilted heap of guilt and misery. Fully deserved guilt and misery, mind you, but none the less painful for all that. I poured myself another glass of brandy, promptly spilt it, and felt ready to throw myself out of the nearest refuse disposal tube.

One hour later, and three more attempted glasses of brandy, the Captain returned, and I don't know if I was mistaken, but he appeared to have a 40° list to starboard...

"Sawyer," he said, "I think you're great officer potential, and a nice all round person..."

Puzzled somewhat by this change of heart on the Captain's part, I leaned towards him, trying my best not to breathe on him.

"Ers... ecs... excuse me, shir. Does thish mean you forgive and forget?"

"In a nutshell, yes." At this point he hiccuped and continued, "Carry on, there's a good girl."

Once again he turned on his heel, this time giving me a sly wink, displaying both his good humour and his slight intoxication.

From then on it was easy to enjoy myself. 02:00 hours saw the end of the reception (shame!) and we all crawled off to bed, tired, happy, and in various stages of pixication... Mr. Spock excepted, of course. Come to think of it, I think he went back on Bridge duty, but I can't really remember...

However, hangovers aside, I am now back in favour for a while, and I think that I am going to be needed at any moment now, so I'll just close with this little anecdote.

Captain Kirk sent the following message to Rav-Anar, care of the Andorian Embassy, Benovas, the day the Tarun Ceti Committee departed.

MR. AMBASSADOR,

WITH REFERENCE TO OUR RECENT RECEPTION OF THE TARUN CETI COMMITTEE, WHICH TOOK PLACE ABOARD THIS VESSEL, USS ENTERPRISE, I WOULD LIKE TO INFORM YOU THAT THE PACKAGES OF OLD ARTICLES OF CLOTHING YOU SO KINDLY SENT TO US WERE NEVER IN FACT REQUIRED. THE SAME IS ALSO TRUE

OF THE SPECIALLY TREATED DOG LEASHES YOU SO GENEROUSLY FORWARDED. WE ARE THEREFORE RETURNING THEM TO YOU, CARE OF THE ANDORIAN EMBASSY, BENOVAS, FOR YOUR COLLECTION.

WITH BEST REGARDS,

JAMES T. KIRK (COMMANDING) USS ENTERPRISE.

And on that note, Gentlebeings, I am forced to plunge myself back into the real world at get back to celebrating the fifth anniversary of my promotion - that is, the fifth day I've had this gold stripe on my sleeve!

See you at next planetfall...

CONTACT by Gillian Catchpole

There had been no occasion to see a forgiving man,
Capable of understanding a Human limitation.
The standards he set seemed unnecessarily severe.
For me, the essence of a man
Is his ability to respond, to express emotion.
Spock's cold detachment had frequently irritated;
I believed there to be only an intellect,
A mind that reasoned without ever feeling.
How then could I ever have imagined
There existed such quantities of honest concern
Had I not witnessed the tender care he gave to Jim?

As we plunged through the tree tops,
The last thing I remember before we crashed
Was the battering of branches against the hull
And the crumpling of flesh in collision with metal.
Jim's injuries were severe; in anger and frustration
I flung the medical kit away, useless and inadequate.
While the others slept I lay confused,
Puzzled by Spock's reaction,
It had helped me a lot to hear from his lips
He trusted my skill.
Was this what Jim had long since known,
Preferred me to discover for myself?
You had to want, to need, yourself
In order to know the depth of his understanding.

He turned the medical kit in his hands,
Suggesting that as a senior officer
It was my duty to control such extravagant emotion.
He was closing the door, making it easy,
Returning us both to where we were before.
How often had others sighed and let it be?
Whatever the motive
I objected to the assumption that discipline and logic
Could ever be a substitute for old-fashioned feeling.
So we argued it out.
And then we touched, a wet slap of contact
That shocked by the strangeness of its approach.
An abrasive contact with thrust and parry,
Not gentle, but harsh like the scraping of rock on rock,
Raw as the whip on an open wound.
A way to reach through his Vulcan restraint
That I could offer.
A chance to heal loneliness without damaging pride,
Communicate with feelings submerged in shame,
Release the heart through honourable expression.

AN IMPOSSIBLE CHOICE by Ann Preece

It was a nightmare, and Kirk was caught in its relentless grip. It had seemed an interminable length of time since he and Spock had answered the distress call from Sigma Aurelis III, and had beamed down - straight into a well-planned Klingon trap.

What had followed was still a blur, proof that he had been drugged in some way; but as the effects of the drug began to wear off, he was vaguely aware of flashes of memory: the realisation that they had walked into a carefully contrived trap; the sudden appearance of the Klingons, led by the evilly-smiling Kaan; and then the burst of phaser fire that had killed his Security personnel.

He and Spock had fared a little better, although Kirk couldn't help smiling wryly at the use of the word 'better', for anything would be preferable to this; to be unwilling guests of the Klingon Empire was not a very pleasant prospect. Instead they had merely been stunned and drugged, only to be brought here - wherever here was.

Kirk had no way of knowing how long he'd been unconscious, or where he was. They could still be on the planet, or - and the thought chilled him - they could have been transported to a Klingon ship. Yet when they had established standard orbit around Sigma Aurelis III, no other vessels had registered on the Enterprise's sensors.

If they were still on the planet, then there was at least a chance that Scotty would be able to locate them. If they weren't... Hurriedly, Kirk pushed the thought away. It wouldn't do to dwell on that...

Then, for the first time, he realised that he was alone - there was no sign of his First Officer. He felt a sudden surge of panic engulf him. Spock! Where was he? What had happened to him? And why had they been separated?

He tried to move, and found that he couldn't. Glancing down curiously, he saw that he was securely fastened to a metal chair with steel bands, which were already beginning to cut into his arms and wrists, making movement impossible.

Resigning himself to the inevitable, at least for the moment, he allowed his gaze to wander around his prison, noting that he was sitting at the end of a long, low-ceilinged room. Although the lighting was very dim, Kirk was able to make out the outline of a large metal door in the wall opposite; but it was the rectangular-shaped frame, positioned between him and the door, and directly in his line of vision, that caught his attention.

The frame was anchored to the floor with great weights to hold it firmly in place, while the top was secured by two metal clamps. Chains and leather straps were fixed to the top and sides, and were no doubt to hold a prisoner firmly in place while...

Kirk dragged his gaze away from the instrument of torture, feeling his insides churn as a wave of nausea swept through him. He closed his eyes in a vain attempt to shut out the sight of the knives and whips that lay on a nearby table, silently waiting, their purpose all too apparent.

He detected a noise outside in the corridor, and stiffened, struggling to maintain control, and trying to breathe evenly in an attempt to still his rapidly beating heart; it wouldn't do for him to break down. Yet he wished that the room wouldn't spin so alarmingly before his eyes...

Slowly the door opened; immediately light flooded the room, almost blinding in its intensity, and Kirk flinched, closing his eyes against the glare. When he opened them again, Kaan had entered, flanked by three guards. He advanced purposefully towards the Human.

"Well, well - we meet again, Captain Kirk. I am so sorry to have kept you waiting, but I was unavoidably detained. Do forgive me." The voice was warm, ingratiating.

"Cut the small talk, Kaan," Kirk snapped, his barely-controlled anger rising

to the surface. "What is the meaning of this? Why have you brought us here? And what have you done with my First Officer? I demand that you..."

"Demand, Captain? Demand? You are not in a position to demand anything of me. You forget, you are my prisoner. Now, shall we dispense with the preliminaries? Such a waste of time, don't you think? Particularly when we have more important matters to discuss." The Klingon smiled as he noted Kirk's look of puzzlement. "But let me explain. It's very simple, really. I - or shall I say, the Klingon Empire - require certain information. You will provide that information."

"What sort of information?" Kirk asked, his voice low.

"Oh, come, Captain. You're an educated man - surely you don't need me to answer that question for you? No, of course not." Kaan laughed - a laugh totally devoid of any humour or warmth. "We want to know the secrets of the Federation; her future plans; the latest developments in technology... Need I go on, Captain?"

"And you think I'm going to supply you with all these little details, Kaan? Don't make me laugh!" Kirk snapped.

"Believe me - laughter is the last thing on my mind."

"And if I refuse?"

"You are not in a position to... refuse. However, if you should prove stubborn, well... we have ways and means of persuading you to talk. What do you say, Captain?"

"Go to the devil!"

"I'm sorry - I didn't quite catch that last remark."

"I said, go to the devil!"

"A good attempt at bravado, Captain - but, I'm afraid, not quite good enough." Without warning Kaan lashed out with the back of his hand, dealing Kirk a heavy blow to the side of his head. Involuntarily a gasp of pain escaped from his lips.

"I'll try again. Are you going to tell me what I want to know?"

"Never!"

Angrily Kaan raised his hand for the next blow - and abruptly changed his mind.

"Very well, Captain. You leave me no other choice. Perhaps the little... 'entertainment' I have arranged for you will loosen your tongue." He turned to two of the guards. "Bring in the prisoner!"

A chill of fear clutched at Kirk's heart. There was no need for him to ask who the prisoner was...

He kept his eyes firmly fixed in the door as a familiar, blue-clad figure was hustled, none-too-gently, into the room.

//Spock!// Silently his mind cried out, yet he did not dare utter a sound.

"I will give you one last chance, Captain. Tell me what I want to know, and your friend will not be harmed. Refuse..." The unfinished statement hung heavily on the air, its meaning abundantly clear.

"I cannot." The words were whispered.

"So be it - you have only yourself to blame for what happens next." Kaan nodded to the two guards who were holding Spock securely between them. "Remove his shirt and fasten him to the frame."

There was the sickening sound of tearing cloth, then Spock was dragged, unresisting, to the instrument of torture. The chains were lowered and fastened around his wrists before being secured to the top of the frame. The sudden movement almost jerked Spock off his feet, but he hung on grimly as the chains

were tightened, thus stretching his arms painfully above his head.

While all this was happening he never made a sound, or allowed a flicker of pain to cross his features; the dark eyes remained steadfastly fixed on Kirk's face, and never once did he allow his gaze to waver. There was understanding in that steady glance - and forgiveness.

Kirk swallowed, hard. His mouth felt dry; his throat constricted; and he could feel the perspiration breaking out on his forehead. With a supreme effort he struggled for control. He couldn't fail Spock by breaking down - he couldn't make it more difficult for the Vulcan.

Kaan spoke. "I ask you again, Captain - consider what is about to happen. Can you honestly allow your First Officer to suffer in this way?"

Kirk struggled to speak, trying to keep his voice steady and even. "He is an officer in Starfleet. He knows what is expected of him... and of me. He knows that I cannot betray the Federation."

Kaan finally lost his temper. "Very well. Let us see if force will succeed when all else has failed. Begin!"

A thick-set Klingon guard stepped forward, and selecting a long-handled whip from the table, advanced on the helpless Vulcan.

"As you can see, Captain, owing to the lack of our usual means of persuasion - I refer, of course, to the mind-sifter - we have had to resort to the old methods of torture. However, though primitive, they have proved rather effective..." He snapped his fingers, and the torture began.

The Klingon was an expert at his craft. The blows fell heavily, cutting deep into Spock's back, and as each lash fell it was punctuated by a question... and another... and another. Always the same questions, with slight variations, as the voice of the interrogator droned on...

"Make it easier on your friend... and yourself... Tell us what we want to know."

"Tell us... Tell us..." The hateful voice persisted, haunting Kirk's mind, allowing him no respite.

And still the torture continued... still the lashes fell... "You are an obstinate man, Captain Kirk. Why make your friend suffer so unnecessarily when all it will take is one word from you to stop the torture? He is strong, but not even a Vulcan can take such treatment indefinitely."

The relentless questions continued, but Kirk remained stubbornly silent, his gaze never wavering from Spock's face as, with each question, the blows continued to fall on the silent Vulcan.

With each blow, Kirk inwardly flinched. It was becoming increasingly difficult to maintain control, to stop himself from breaking down and telling Kaan what he wanted to know. But he couldn't - he was a Starfleet officer bound by oath to the Federation, and whatever happened it was his duty to remain silent.

But... what of his duty - his loyalty - to Spock? How could he possibly stand by and continue to watch his suffering? Yet he knew he must. Spock would understand that he had no choice - the look in the dark eyes said as much. Yet if this continued much longer...

"Tell us what we want to know, Captain " The cruel voice cut in on his thoughts.

Wearily, Kirk shook his head. "I have nothing to say," he repeated for the hundredth time. "I have nothing to say."

"Do you still refuse to assist us, Captain?" Kaan's face appeared in front of Kirk, the eyes cold, the voice hard.

"You know my answer, Kaan - I cannot betray the Federation."

"Not even to save your friend's life? He cannot possibly hold out much longer. What will you do when he begs you for mercy?"

Kirk's stomach twisted, but he remained unmoving. "He will not beg!" he said tightly, gripping hold of the chair arms lest Kaan see that his hands were trembling.

"We shall see, Captain... we shall see. By the time we have finished you will both be begging me for mercy. However..."

Kaan held up his hand, and Spock's torturer lowered the whip. Instantly a deathly hush fell over the room and its occupants, marred only by the sound of the Vulcan's laboured breathing. Mercifully, unconsciousness had claimed him, providing a brief respite from the intolerable pain; but how long would it be before Kaan ordered him to be revived?

The silence stretched on, but the order didn't come. Defiantly Kirk looked Kaan straight in the eyes. He would not show fear in front of this Klingon, whatever happened, whatever price he had to pay.

But what if the price was too high? What if Spock were that price? No! He couldn't lose Spock... not now... not after they had come so far together, shared so much. But what was he going to do?

For the moment, however, Kaan saved him the agony of coming to a decision.

"I can see that this discussion is not going to get us anywhere - for the moment!" the Klingon snapped. Kirk's stubbornness and obstinacy were making him impatient, but it wouldn't do for him to lose his temper - at least, not just yet.

"Very well, Captain. Perhaps you need a little time to consider your situation before you come to such an important decision. Guards!" Two Klingons stepped forward. "Take him!"

At last the pressure was released from Kirk's wrists and arms as the metal bands snapped open. He stood up, swaying slightly as the sudden movement brought on an attack of dizziness. He glanced over to where the unconscious Vulcan was still fastened to the frame, his head slumped on his chest, emerald blood from multiple wounds forming a steady pool on the floor at his feet.

"What about Spock?" It was an agonised whisper.

"What about him?" The answering voice was cold, hard.

"You can't leave him there!" Kirk exclaimed. "If you have any shred of decency left in you..."

Kaan was silent for a long moment, carefully considering. So far this mission had proved unsuccessful. Force had been used as a means of persuasion - to no avail. Perhaps a more subtle approach was called for? It was certainly worth a try; after all, he had nothing to lose - and much to gain.

"Very well, Captain. Unfasten him."

Kirk did not have to be told twice. He was at Spock's side in an instant, his fingers struggling to loosen the chains which were the only things keeping the Vulcan on his feet - without their support he would have fallen.

Very, very carefully he lifted Spock in his arms and allowed the guards to lead them from the interrogation room, down a long corridor, to another, smaller room - yet another prison. The door slammed shut behind them, cutting off any thought - or hope - of escape.

Kirk glanced around their temporary 'home' - the room was small, cramped, and sparsely furnished, with only a narrow bed, a chair, and a small table holding a bowl and a pitcher of water.

Gently, Kirk laid his precious burden on the bed, turning Spock onto his side to ease his breathing, before tending to his wounds.

At the sight of such wounds Kirk was almost physically sick. How Spock had suffered - must still be suffering! It must be taking every ounce of his Vulcan strength to control the almost unbearable pain coursing through him, and Kirk railed against a race that could inflict such suffering on others.

Using one of the coverlets from the bed, Kirk tore it into strips to use as temporary bandages. It was a painfully slow task, and he was hampered by the lack of proper materials and poor facilities. This was the one occasion when he could have wished that McCoy was with them - now, more than ever, he had need of the doctor's expert medical help. Yet, underneath, he was glad that Bones wasn't there - at least he had been spared this!

Eventually, he finished. It had been difficult, but at least he had been able to stem the flow of blood from the deeper wounds. But had he done enough? Only time would tell - and time was fast running out... for both of them.

Leaving his friend to rest, Kirk began to pace the cramped quarters. With each passing moment their situation was growing more desperate, and it seemed as though his early fears - that they were indeed on a Klingon ship - were confirmed; for surely, if they were still on Sigma Aurelis III, Scotty would have located them by now?

Kirk had never felt so helpless. There was nowhere to turn, nothing he could do. If he gave in to Kaan, he would betray the Federation; if he held out, then his best friend would die. It was an impossible choice - but he knew he had to face up to the fact that a choice had to be made.

He halted his restless pacing, and sat down heavily on the chair at the side of the bed, his face buried in his hands. What was he going to do? What was he going to do?

"Jim..."

At the sound of his name Kirk raised his head. Spock had regained consciousness some minutes earlier, and had spent the ensuing moments studying the bowed head of the friend who was so dear to him. Without having to ask, he knew instinctively what Kirk was thinking - knew the choice which had to be made - and knew that he would have to help Kirk come to the right decision.

"Jim..." He held out his hand as Kirk moved from the chair and dropped to his knees at the side of the bed. Their fingers entwined, reaffirming the unique bond that had always existed between them, a bond that had provided a necessary lifeline to them both on numerous occasions.

Although it was an effort to speak, and it was taking most of Spock's mental concentration to control the pain surging through him, there were certain things that had to be said.

"Jim... whatever happens... do not give in to Kaan."

"But Spock... I can't let him hurt you any more. You've suffered so much. If anything happens to you..."

"What is one life as opposed to the entire Federation? Give in now, and you betray your oath to Starfleet; you will destroy everything you believe in, everything you hold dear. I... cannot allow you to do that."

"And I can't allow you to die, Spock. I can't lose you... not now. There must be some other way..."

Spock shook his head. "Not this time, Jim. This time, the odds are stacked too heavily against us."

"This is my worst fear realised," Kirk whispered. "That one day I would be forced to make such a choice as this..."

"It is a fear which haunts me also, Jim. But you have to come to a decision - and soon - and it must be the right decision. You must not allow your... feelings... to cloud your judgement."

"Spock, I..."

Spock's grip tightened, silencing his friend before he could speak further. "We are Starfleet officers, Jim. We both know - perhaps have always known - that one day something of this nature could happen. I am only sorry that it has come so soon... Our duty must come first - underneath you know that to be true. And always remember that, whatever happens, I do not blame you. There is only one possible choice that you can make - you know that too, don't you?"

Mutely, Kirk nodded, bowing his head so that Spock couldn't see the tears in his eyes. "If only there was something I could do!" he whispered.

The reply was soft, almost inaudible. "There is something you can do."

Kirk looked up, puzzled. "Just ask..."

"Hold me... please..."

Kirk needed no further prompting. His arms encircled the Vulcan, drawing him close, aware that he was possibly the only person from whom Spock would accept such contact, and he was unashamed to feel the bitter sting of tears on his cheeks.

For long moments they clung together until, in the distance, they could hear the sound of heavy footsteps approaching the cell door.

"Jim... Kaan returns."

//So soon.// They had had so little time together.

Gently, Kirk drew away, releasing his hold on his friend, and as the door opened, Spock whispered,

"Remember - whatever happens - you made the right decision."

"The right decision..."

The right decision..."

The words echoed in Kirk's mind, haunting him, repeating themselves over and over...

"No!" He sobbed. "No! No! NO!"

The quiet figure on the diagnostic bed in the Enterprise's Sickbay suddenly began to struggle, tossing wildly back and forth, as though engaged in some violent, imaginary battle.

Alarmed by the sudden change in the Captain's condition, McCoy hurried over, gently restraining the wild thrashing.

"Easy now, Jim... Try and relax... That's it," he soothed. "You're quite safe now..."

Gradually the struggling eased, then stopped completely as the murmured words slowly penetrated Kirk's fogged mind. Still lost in his nightmare world, he wondered if this was yet another new torture designed to break him. Hesitantly, he opened his eyes, prepared for almost anything, and found himself staring up into a pair of brilliant blue eyes clouded now with concern as McCoy fussed over him like the proverbial mother hen.

Kirk swallowed, and struggled to speak, although his throat felt tight, his mouth dry.

"Bones?" he asked, puzzled. "But... where am I?"

Relieved at his recovery, McCoy retorted, "Why is it that whenever anyone regains consciousness, they always ask the same question? Can't you think of anything more original to say?" He grinned, then sobered as he realised that Kirk's question was genuine. "You're in Sickbay, of course. Where did you think you were?"

"I... don't know." Kirk hesitated. "Everything seems so confused..."

Suddenly he stiffened, a wave of panic engulfing him. "Spock! Where's Spock?" he cried, attempting to sit up. "I must..."

A tall figure slowly extricated itself from the shadows and approached the bed. A soft, familiar voice replied, "Here, Captain."

At the sound of the dearly-loved voice, Kirk sank back against his pillows, relief rushing through him, leaving him weak and trembling.

"Spock..." Kirk faltered, slowly reaching out to touch the Vulcan's face in an attempt to convince himself that his friend was real - and mercifully unharmed; that this wasn't some kind of cruel joke. "You're all right? But... I thought..."

"Of course he's all right, Jim," McCoy began. "Why shouldn't he be...?" He fell silent as he caught sight of the warning expression on Spock's face.

"What's been happening to me?" Kirk asked. "I... don't understand..."

The Vulcan spoke quietly. "Jim... Can you remember anything of what happened on Sigma Aurelis III?"

At the mention of the planet's name, Kirk visibly paled. So the planet did exist! It wasn't just a figment of his imagination! But...

"What did you say the planet was called?" he asked, his voice little more than a whisper.

"Sigma Aurelis III. We have just completed a routine planetary survey, and..." Spock stopped as he noticed Kirk trying to suppress an involuntary shudder. The movement was not lost on McCoy either. Worriedly, they exchanged concerned glances.

"Jim... what is it?" Spock asked.

A frown creased Kirk's brow as he struggled to concentrate, to separate reality from... what? Imagination? Hallucination?

"I seem to remember beaming down to the planet's surface, then..."

"Go on," McCoy coaxed.

"It all seems so hazy... There was very little for me to do at the landing site... and I remember wandering off on my own... Everything was so beautiful, so peaceful - and the flowers!" He paused for a moment, allowing the memories to return, before continuing hesitantly, "There was one flower in particular which caught my attention; very large, blue, with a heavy scent... a thick, cloying smell... I remember stooping over to examine it more closely... I felt dizzy, then..." He fell silent, biting his lip, and shuddered as the memory returned to haunt him.

"Then what?" the doctor prompted.

Kirk shook his head. "I... can't remember anything else." He couldn't explain about the nightmare which had seemed so vivid - so real... Not yet...

But McCoy was speaking, and he forced himself to return to the present, to concentrate on what the doctor was saying.

"Your account certainly seems to tie in with the other reports I've received from the landing party, although you seem to have been more deeply affected..."

"What do you mean, Bones? Affected by what?" Kirk asked, puzzled.

"I think I'd better explain," McCoy replied. "At first glance, Sigma Aurelis III seemed an ideal world for colonisation - a veritable paradise, in fact - rich vegetation, abundant flora and fauna - and the survey had passed without incident, until members of the landing party began to complain of headaches, dizziness and sleepiness. Somewhat at a loss to understand what was responsible for this anomaly, Spock and I investigated further. It didn't take too long to find the culprit - a plant, or flower, of the 'Papaver' family." McCoy grinned as he noticed Kirk's look of puzzlement, and hastened to explain.

"Don't look so puzzled, Jim. The 'Papaver' - or poppy, to give it its more common name - was a flower native to Earth, well-renowned for its narcotic properties. Remember, Jim - opium? Poppy-juice? Well, the properties of the plants on Sigma Aurelis III closely resemble those of the poppy, except that this strain has even stronger hallucinatory powers which accentuate and highlight a person's innermost thoughts and fears. Such effects can often be traumatic."

And judging by the state you were in when you regained consciousness, Jim, your hallucination must have been extremely traumatic, McCoy thought.

"Having discovered what was affecting the landing party, I ordered everyone to be beamed aboard, but it took slightly longer to locate you. Jim... when will you learn to be more careful, and not wander off on your own?" The sparkle in the blue eyes, however, belied the stern words, but Kirk refused to be drawn.

"How are the others?" he asked, his voice tinged with concern.

"Fine, Jim - absolutely fine. Once away from the planet's surface and the influence of the plants, everyone made a rapid recovery. It took slightly longer for you to regain consciousness because you had been exposed to the scent for a greater length of time. But don't look so worried - there are no side effects."

"Do I have to stay here, Bones, or can I go to my quarters?" Kirk asked.

McCoy shrugged. "I don't think there's any reason for you to remain here, Jim, but if I do realse you, I want you to promise me that you'll rest, and that you'll call if you need me. Will you do that?"

"Sure, Bones," Kirk replied with a slight smile, the first smile the two men had seen since their Captain had regained consciousness.

As Kirk slid off the bed McCoy glanced across at Spock. "I'm counting on you to keep an eye on him, Spock. See that he does as he's told." And try to find out what's worrying him, was the unspoken thought.

"I will, Doctor." The dark eyes held a silent promise.

Quietly, the two friends left the room.

McCoy watched his friends as they left Sickbay together; his face creased with lines of worry, and he allowed a tired sigh to escape his lips. He hoped he'd done the right thing in allowing Kirk to leave Sickbay, but what else could he have done? The Captain had made a complete recovery - at least physically - and had shown no sign of any side effects. Yet, in spite of that, McCoy was concerned. Kirk's entire attitude had changed, and to the doctor's experienced eye he seemed strained and tense, as though something was worrying him. Not for the first time, McCoy wondered just what had ahppened to Kirk while he was under the influence of the poppies. Whatever it was, he was obviously very reluctant to talk about it.

McCoy was glad he'd asked Spock to keep an eye on the Captain for him. The Vulcan could always be relied upon to keep his word, especially where Jim Kirk was concerned. Perhaps Spock could discover what was troubling him - Lord knew, he looked as though he needed to talk to someone!

With a weary sigh the doctor turned his attention to the pile of reports awaiting him in the outer office. He had done all he could - the rest was up to Spock now. Perhaps he would be more successful. McCoy sincerely hoped so...

The objects of McCoy's concern were making their way to Kirk's quarters. The short journey was made in silence, with no word passing between them, yet Kirk was very much aware of the Vulcan's quiet presence at his side, dependable, supportive.

By this time they reached the Captain's quarters, and both men paused on the threshold for a moment, a little uncertain as to what to say or do next. Although he had returned to reality, the after effects of the hallucination

still held Kirk in a relentless grip, and he suddenly felt afraid to enter his quarters, afraid of being alone...

As he struggled to control his mounting anxiety, a quiet voice said, "I know Dr. McCoy suggested you rest, but if you need to talk..." //I am here.// The unspoken thought flashed between them.

Gratefully, Kirk nodded, relief flooding through him; and turning, he led the way into the cabin. Wearily he sat down at his desk, and rested his head on his arms for a brief moment while he tried to collect his thoughts. He desperately needed Spock's help, but was so afraid of asking, for the Vulcan gave so much, never asking for anything in return...

Spock waited in silence, regarding his Captain's bowed head, his dark eyes filled with concern. He had sensed Kirk's distress in Sickbay, but knew that the first move had to come from him; Spock realised that it was up to him to offer the help Kirk so desperately needed. He had always vowed that whenever Kirk needed help... needed him... he would be there to support, to comfort. He couldn't fail him now.

"Would it help you to tell me about it?" he asked.

Slowly, Kirk nodded. Perhaps if he could tell Spock it would help to remove some of the horror he still felt, a horror which persisted even though he knew that nothing of what had happened had been true.

Spock listened intently while Kirk relived his experience all over again. He told his story frankly, leaving nothing out, unashamed to show how deeply the entire incident had affected him.

"The hallucination was so real, Spock... and it's something I've always feared, that one day I would be forced to choose between my duty and my... my friendship for you. They were forcing me to do just that, and it was a choice which was impossible to make..." He fell silent, too choked to continue further, as the memories returned to haunt him.

He shivered. "But why, Spock? What does it all mean? It seemed so vivid... so real..."

"It was only a hallucination, Jim, brought on by the effects of the plants. In addition, you have been working extremely hard of late, and as a result you are over-taxed. Ideally, you need plenty of rest. I know..." Spock added as Kirk started to protest, "... that has not been possible over the past weeks. You are over-tired, and all the doubts and uncertainties, the fears and worries, which are normally pushed to the back of your mind, came to the surface. The hallucinatory properties of the plant played on this, highlighting and emphasising your subconscious thoughts. But you will feel much better in the morning... I promise you." He paused before asking, "Do you wish me to call McCoy?"

Kirk shook his head. "No... No, I don't think so. There's no need to bother Bones - not now. I... feel fine, really. You're here... and that's all that matters." He hesitated. "Did you know that I was so afraid of asking you for help?"

"Why should you feel afraid?" Spock asked, puzzled.

"You give so much... always giving... never taking... While I..."

The Vulcan's expression softened imperceptibly. "Indeed, Jim - you give far more than you perhaps realise," he said softly. "But no matter. I always vowed that whenever you needed my help... I would be here."

"And you've never failed me, have you, Spock?"

"No - nor do I intend to."

"Thank you for being here when I needed you."

Spock stood up, a warm smile lighting the usually serious features. "I

think it is time you followed McCoy's suggestion and tried to rest now. Here, let me help you."

Within minutes Kirk was in bed. Spock settled him comfortably, drawing up the coverlet before answering the unspoken question in Kirk's eyes.

"Do not worry. I will stay until you are asleep."

He drew up a chair and sat down, not surprised to note that Kirk was already showing signs of drowsiness - he would soon be asleep.

"Spock?"

"Yes?"

"Are there times when you feel afraid?"

There was a brief pause before Spock answered. "Yes... although I do try to suppress my fears. However... there is one fear which is with me constantly."

Kirk's eyes flew open, surprised - and awed - by such an admission from Spock.

"What is it?" he prompted, as Spock remained silent.

The Vulcan hesitated for a brief moment, but Kirk had spoken frankly - now it was his turn.

"Watching you walk into danger... wondering if you will return safely... the fear of losing you..."

"You feel it, too?"

"Yes, Jim... I feel it. It is something which was present from the very beginning; something which has grown steadily over the years... and it is something which will not die."

"We belong together, Spock," Kirk murmured softly.

Spock nodded. "Yes... and whatever the future holds for us, we will face it together... as we have always done."

//As we always will//

ECHOES OF IMMUNITY by Lee Owers

Stay with me now -
and help me to forget
that all too suddenly today, my life was ripped apart
and you were gone.

Reach out your hand -
so, with a touch,
I can believe in the reality of you, and cease to fear
the siren call of grief's illusion.

Call out my name -
the one so softly-spoken sound
that can dispel the silent echoes of imagined death
I hear, in place of you..

Share thought with thought -
to feel the endless agony of knowing
it was I, who chose cold duty against friendship's treasured flame.
And, if you can...

Tell me you understand.

A DISTRESSING TENDENCY TO GIGGLE by Meg Wright

"Recording ship's arrival, dear."

Kirk cut his look of annoyance short and jabbed the intercom again. "Starfleet Control. Repeating message. The Enterprise is home. Kirk out."

He snapped off the intercom and smiled over his shoulder at Spock. "Home... lovely word, isn't it?"

Spock eyed him in blank incomprehension. "It is a word, sir, like any other."

"But doesn't it conjure up warm slippers, cosy armchair...?" Kirk broke off. "No, I guess it doesn't, not for a Vulcan." He slid out of the command chair smothering a smile. "Three weeks at a Starbase, I think you said, Mr. Spock? To fix that over-affectionate, velvet-tongued siren that used to be a ship's computer!"

Spock joined him at the entrance to the turbolift. "A minimum of three weeks, Captain," he corrected.

"In that case..." Kirk set his hand to the control, "Deck 5... in that case prepare for a good, long shore leave, Mr. Spock. I'm not living with an over-sexed mechanical brain any longer."

Spock's eyebrows flared. "The computer is perfectly functional, Captain. Do you think it is possible to justify a delay of three weeks or more before we go on to our next assignment?"

Kirk rubbed his chin ruminatively. "It's not going to be easy," he admitted.

Since they were in the privacy of the turbolift, Spock permitted a slightly sardonic expression to cross his face. "I have no doubt that you will think of something, Captain," he said with deadly politeness.

Kirk eyed his friend with amusement. "That almost sounds like a challenge."

Spock shook his head. "Merely a show of faith in the deviousness of your mind, sir."

Kirk was still laughing when he entered his quarters. He settled to routine paper work, giving one part of his mind over to the problem. There must be some fool-proof way to convince Starfleet Command of the absolute necessity of returning the ship's computer to its normal functioning. He must find one... or forfeit his First Officer's respect! It was certainly irritating to receive sultrily seductive replies to the simplest questions, but could it actually be described as dangerous?

To his way of thinking, it could. A ship's Captain had enough worries at the best of times without any extra irritations being added to his daily lot. And since his 'daily lot' for the next day or two would consist of coping with Commodore Burn, the Portmaster of Starbase 9, he could well do without any other irritations.

Burn was guaranteed to raise any Captain's blood pressure alarmingly - indeed, it was at his insistence that the work on the computer had been done on Cygnet XIV in the first place. He had an unreasonably high estimation of his own scientific judgement, and an acute reluctance to listen to any opinion other than his own. It was Kirk's private bet that after their recent brush with the black star, and their trip into Earth's past, Burn would be beside himself with pompous self-importance over the opportunity to display his scientific expertise to an admiring world.

He paused suddenly, his stylus poised over the report he was about to sign. Wasn't it on Starbase 9 that the Vulcan Science Academy had just opened a new research department? Just the people to be interested in their recent, 'fascinating' trip into history. The whole situation could hardly be bettered. He snapped on the intercom.

"Mr. Spock, come to my quarters a moment, if you please."

Spock covered his surprise well. "I have no doubt that Sular and his staff would be interested in the data, yes, sir."

"Good." Kirk smiled. "We'll invite Commodore Burn and Sular to dinner tonight."

"Commodore Burn?" Spock eyed him oddly. "I seem to recall that on the last occasion you entertained the Commodore, you stated somewhat intemperately that it would be the last time you did so without a direct order from Starfleet."

Kirk managed to look shocked. "I said that? No, no, I'm sure you must be mistaken. The Commodore may be a little lacking in the social graces..."

"You described him as an over-bearing, pompous, self-opinionated, inefficient younger son of a Taurean gant-herder," Spock said with ruthless accuracy.

Kirk winced. "Sometimes your memory is too good, Mr. Spock. Please be so kind as to forget you ever heard such a preposterous statement."

"Very well."

"After all," Kirk said airily, "a man with such a superb scientific background must be the logical choice to interpret the data for Mr. Sular." He watched the dawning comprehension on the inexpressive face and smiled. Really (if one did not know better, of course) one could swear the Vulcan was beginning to look apprehensive.

Kirk had decided it would be politic to limit his guest list, and there were only six persons gathered round the table. Commodore Burn, Mr. Sular, Dr. McCoy, Mr. Scott, Mr. Spock and himself. The Commodore had already expressed avuncular disappointment over the absence of 'your delectable Communications Officer, Captain', in patronising tones which made Kirk extremely glad Uhura was not there to hear.

Dinner had been impeccably prepared and served to accomodate both Human and Vulcan tastes, and they had reached the coffee and brandy stage before Kirk gently began to steer the conversation in the direction he wanted it to take. Having earlier expertly ducked a direct answer to a question concerning their somewhat dramatic arrival at Starbase 9, he now made an indirect reference to it in his conversation with Sular. He saw Burn prick his ears and relaxed in his chair. From now on it should be all too easy.

"Your arrival was late, Captain," Burn said severely, "and I understand from my staff that you were out of radio contact for over half-an-hour. I trust you are going to provide us with an excellent explanation for such remissness."

Kirk smiled sweetly. If Burn was prepared to issue reprimands publicly on a social occasion, he would have no qualms about his own questionable behaviour.

"Our lateness was unintentional, I assure you, Commodore. We began attempting to control our passage some fifty years out - we were a little concerned in case we overshot considerably and did not arrive for another fifty years."

Sular's eyebrows rose fractionally at this extraordinary statement. Kirk turned to him.

"Are you familiar with the problems concerning the utilisation of gravitational fields to produce velocity/time displacement?"

The stony Vulcan face displayed what amounted in effect to a dropped jaw. "You have recently been involved in something of the sort, Captain Kirk? It is a fascinating theory."

"Not only a theory now, Mr. Sular," Kirk assured him. "We encountered a hitherto uncharted black dwarf on our passage here, and were thrown back some years, to July 13th, 1969 to be precise."

"5:30 p.m. Old U.S.A. Eastern Standard Time," Spock added, meticulously exact as ever.

"And you were able to navigate back sufficiently accurately to return only half-an-hour after you encountered the black star?"

"Thanks to Mr. Spock's excellent computer work, yes."

Burn was spluttering away gently like a simmering kettle beside Kirk. In mercy he turned his attention to him.

"Why was I not told of this?" Burn demanded angrily.

"Our full report is already in your office," Kirk said placidly. "I am surprised you have not seen it."

He was well aware of Burns' lofty disregard for the day-to-day trivia of reports, expecting subordinates to bring important details to his notice. Kirk's report had been deliberately low-key and dry, factually correct in every way, but designed to be... overlooked. Its arrival in Burns' office had also been timed to perfection. It would be there on his desk awaiting him when he took the trouble to check.

"This field is somewhat of an interest of mine," Burn said stiffly. "I should like to have the fullest details."

"I, too, would find the data interesting," Sular nodded.

"May I suggest," Kirk eyed Vulcan and Human guest in turn, "that you both come back tomorrow morning and study the data directly with the on-board computer. Since the Enterprise is assigned to star-mapping in the Daltan sector we will have to be on our way within two days. Working on board here you can both have the advantage of Mr. Spock's advice and assistance. After all, the original theory and computations were his."

"The on-board computer..." Scott began in tones of dismay.

"Some more brandy, if you please, Mr. Scott," Spock said firmly, indicating his empty glass.

Diverted, Scott passed him the decanter, openly giving an astonished stare over it first at Spock and then at McCoy.

Kirk hid a grin and drank a silent toast to his Vulcan friend.

Early next day the computer section received its expected influx of guests. Spock had obviously done his Captain proud and convinced Sular to bring two of his senior staff with him. Burn fussed about importantly, assigning stations, moving people around, and generally directing operations.

At last he had everyone organised to his satisfaction, and held up a fat little hand. The already-quiet Vulcans lapsed into complete silence. Kirk leaned back in his chair with a glow of satisfaction. So far he'd not had to make a single move to help things along. Burn had begun to dig his own yawning pit with the hand of a master. He composed his face to the required gravity, and turned politely to the Commodore.

"Now that I have your attention," Burn puffed, "we can begin to study this fascinating experience. On the whole, the Enterprise seems to have coped with it admirably... yes, I think I can say admirably, but perhaps we scientists will be able to extract some small items of value which these busy officers in the field may have overlooked." He beamed round at them all impartially, and added with anxious importance, "Computer."

Kirk held his breath.

"Working... dear."

Kirk looked down at his feet. It was remarkable how much seductive innuendo that mechanical vamp managed to put into two quite ordinary words.

Burn looked faintly surprised, but covered it well. "Relay all the data concerning the theory of velocity/time displacement," he instructed pompously.

"How terribly boring, darling," the computer purred, "but if you absolutely insist... ducky..."

Three pairs of Vulcan eyebrows were definitely on the rise. Kirk looked away again sharply, re-asserting his own self-control with determination.

"Computer off," Burn ordered curtly. He rounded on Kirk. "Why did you not inform me your computer is faulty, Captain?"

Kirk raised his brows. "It is not, Commodore," he said blankly. "It has only recently been completely overhauled by the technicians on Cygnet XIV in compliance with your own orders. It has developed no faults since then, has it, Mr. Spock?"

"Indeed no, sir," Spock replied at once. "It is in precisely the same condition it was when their experts completed the work." Only Kirk saw the flicker which added, "Unfortunately!"

Burns suspended his disbelief temporarily and tried again. "Computer."

"I was afraid you'd lost interest in little old me," the computer said sultrily. How a disembodied voice could pout Kirk didn't know, but it managed it. "I'm all ready and waiting for you, sugar-daddy."

There was a moment or two of stunned silence broken only by an incoherent gobbling sound from Burn.

Sular ignored the unfortunate term. It was possible of course that it was a colloquialism outside his experience. He eyed Burn impassively, waiting for him. His two subordinates exchanged stony-faced glances, and then looked at the quivering Human also.

Burn took a deep breath to steady himself, and began yet again. "Correlate all references to time/velocity displacement and relay the data to the screen," he said sharply.

"Working... sweetie; but a girl does like to hear you say 'please'," the computer sulked.

Burn turned his glazing eyes on Kirk. "Cygnet XIV, you said, Captain? The Matriarchy?"

"Yes. They thought the computer lacked personality," Kirk explained indifferently.

Burn gulped, nodded, turned back to ensure that everything was going well. The Vulcans were pointedly ignoring the unfortunate circumstances, busily absorbing data and exchanging views and opinions. Deciding they could safely be left to themselves for a while, Burn signalled to Kirk and took him on one side.

"Captain, does the computer always behave like this now?" he asked.

"Its present personality is quite well-defined," Kirk told him cheerfully. "She's quite a girl, isn't she?"

"Have you made no attempt to alter it? It's... it's outrageous!"

"Oh yes," Kirk assured him. "Mr. Spock finds its tendency to giggle rather distressing, and has made several attempts to eradicate it, but the system is too well integrated to alter one part on its own."

"Giggle!" Burn looked horrified. "Computers do not giggle!"

"This one does," Kirk said brightly. "Rather attractively... a throaty quality to it..."

Burn threw him a repressive look and drew himself up. "I shall not encourage it to giggle at me," he said decidedly.

Kirk bowed his head in apparent shame, inwardly alight with laughter. The

one thing guaranteed to induce the ship's siren into demonstrating its full potential as a female seductress was to become authoritative with it. It was the one sure way to annoy the Matriarchs of Cygnet XIV too, of course, which Burn ought to have remembered, but had clearly forgotten.

His eyes steely with determination, Burn returned to the main arena. "Well, gentlemen, if we are ready to move on...?"

There were general nods of assent, and Burn instructed the computer to play back the data received during the encounter with the black star. It emitted a gusty sigh at which even the imperturbable Vulcans looked up in surprise.

"Working, but you really must watch your manners, darling, and in any case it's more fun to be a little... personal."

"Personal!" Burn almost exploded with affronted dignity. "I have no intention of exchanging personal remarks with... with..."

There was a low husky chuckle. "Naughty, naughty! Now who's being personal? Don't call a lady names! Data on screen, my handsome little plaything."

Burn gave the computer an apoplectic exclamation of disgust and commanded the computer to be silent in a voice that shook.

"There's no need to get angry," the computer said perkily. "But you're very cute when you're angry."

"Computer," Kirk said swiftly. "Please... be quiet, there's a dear."

Burn's face bore a look of relief mingled with offended rage, but he said with annoyance, "There's no need to beg like that, Captain. It is only a computer."

"I beg your pardon, Commodore, but the Captain acted in the only manner the computer reacts to nowadays," Spock interrupted quietly.

Sular recomposed his face and got to his feet. "We find it exceedingly difficult to work under these conditions," he said firmly. "May I request that the relevant data is transferred to the Science Academy computer so that we can make our own studies? From the little I have seen, and the discussions I have had with Commander Spock, this is a valuable field of study, but not under present conditions." He walked quietly to the door.

The other Vulcans politely rose and filed out after him, ignoring Burns' fussy attempts to make conciliatory noises. By the time the room was empty he was almost sobbing with frustration.

"Your assignment to the Deltan sector will have to be postponed, Captain," he stuttered. "We really cannot have important scientific work held up in this way. The Enterprise will have her computer system adjusted as a matter of priority."

"If you say so, Commodore," Kirk said doubtfully. "It really does work adequately."

"I find your attitude extraordinary," Burns said angrily. "I will brook no argument. Your next assignment is postponed for a month. Kindly do not make any protest, it will not be listened to. You and your crew must resign yourselves to a month's inactivity."

"Very well, Commodore," Kirk said politely. "We will get the work put in hand straight away."

He accompanied him to the transporter room, uttering soothing noises the while, maintaining his gravity with difficulty until the sparkle finally dissolved. He turned to the door and found Spock waiting by it.

"Break out the camping gear, Spock," he said happily. "Your faith has been rewarded."

"I never doubted that it would be otherwise," Spock said in mild surprise. "I made all the necessary arrangements with Stores yesterday. We leave in twenty minutes."

NI VAR by Sheryl Peterson

How empty would my life have been
 If I had never known you.
 If I had never looked upon you face
 Or hungered for your smile.
 If our minds had never touched
 Like brushing wings across a canyon,
 Then I would have never known
 You'd walked beside me all the while.
 The path I trod was lonely
 Because all my thoughts were 'different'.
 I had to be what I was,
 Not what they thought I should be.
 And I thought I would walk alone
 Through years of frigid wandering.
 But you said, "Let me help, my friend,"
 And became a part of me.
 We cannot put it into words -
 How to describe this current?
 Like two moons around a planet
 We are bound 'cross Space and Time.
 Others only see the Captain
 And the Vulcan, strange and different,
 That 'thinking machine with pointed ears'
 With a computer for a mind.
 You see into my inner places
 Where no-one else enters,
 My lonely corridors of self
 A maze through which you lead.
 I cannot tell you what I feel.
 I am trained to non-emotion.
 But you smile and clasp my shoulder,
 And I know, Jim, there's no need.

EMOTION by Ann Smith

If you can feel your heart uplifting,
 As you gaze up at the sky,
 Where an alien sun is drifting
 Worlds passing by.
 If poetry can move you,
 Laughter and tears...

the sadness brought by autumn
 the joyous leap of spring,
 the warm scents of summer
 the cold the winters bring.

Appreciate all the living
 (Though logical in mind.)

My friend, you have found Emotion...

the Human kind.

The Vulcan Hawk



by Sheryl Peterson

What impish fingers plucked those pointed ears?
 And made those eyebrows winged to soar away
 Across those carven, hollowed, craggy cheeks
 Where laughter never saw the light of day?
 Those dark eyes seem to look on things unseen,
 Two deep pools, bottomless, in wells of stone.
 Like some strange bird of prey, you watch and brood,
 And even in their midst, you are alone.
 What lies behind that stern and icy mask
 That hides your thoughts like armour-plated steel?
 You make of it a fortress none may pass.
 Do you fear so, to let them know you feel?
 What brought you winging 'cross the cliffs of Space?
 A stranger to an even stranger land.
 On the Enterprise you found your perch at last,
 To sit like some proud hawk on Kirk's right hand.
 But what I would not give to see you smile -
 To see those dark eyes thaw, and show the sun.
 The magic already within those depths
 Would not be lost, you who are two, yet one.
 Come from your lonely crag, you Vulcan Hawk.
 Cast off your frigid wandering, alone.
 Your blood is green, but half of it is Earth.
 You cannot starve within your walls of stone.
 To see that hidden warmth show through in smiles -
 To hear till-now-unheard-of Vulcan laughter -
 Oh, then would I be Kipling's Thousandth Man,
 And follow you through this life and Hereafter.

ZINE ADS

October 1981

CHEAP THRILLS - a no-frills K/S zine - please do not order if you object to the premise. Carol Hunteerton, 43 Old Bergen Rd, Jersey City, NJ 07305, U.S.A.

ENTER-COMM - a genzine from Marjorie McKenna, 1068 Bathgate Drive, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1J 8E8. Also DREADNAUGHT EXPLORATIONS.

FINAL FRONTIER - an explicit K/S zine from Cynthia Drake, 1387 L Street, Elmont, NY 11003, U.S.A. An age statement (over 18) required.

GRIP - a mixed media genzine from Roberta Rogow, P.O. Box 124, Fair Lawn, NJ 11003, U.S.A. Also TREXINDEX - a listing of stories and writers and where those stories appeared.

GALACTIC DISCOURSE - Laurie Huff, Disc. Div. House, U. of Chicago, 1156 E. 57th St, Chicago, IL 60637, U.S.A. An excellent genzine - issues 1, 2 & 3 available. Also PRECESSIONAL, a novel dealing with lasting changes in the lives of Kirk and Spock. Since Laurie is now at university, there may be delays in getting orders filled, as her stock of zines will probably be kept at home.

OUT OF BOUNDS - a K/S zine from Cindy Deren, 2521 Woodnere Ave, Akron, Ohio 44312, U.S.A. Very A/U stories. An age statement (over 18) required.

SOL PLUS - a genzine from Jackie Bielowiez, 4677 N. Boulder, Tulsa, OK 74126, U.S.A.

SPIN DIZZIE - a genzine at a very reasonable price. No 6 will probably be the last. Marilyn Johansen, 11424 Kensington Dr, Eden Prairie, MN 55344, U.S.A.

T'HY'LA - a K/S zine from Kathleen Resch, P.O. Box 2262 Mission Station, Santa Clara, CA 95055, U.S.A. Will not knowingly be sold to anyone under 18.

VAULT OF TOMORROW - a genzine from Marion McChesney, 3429 Chestnut Ave, Baltimore, MD 21211, U.S.A.

CAPTAIN'S LOG - a genzine from Sylvia Billings, 49 Southampton Rd, Far Cotton, Northampton, England. Make cheques payable to Sylvia Billings.

COMMUNICATOR - a newsletter giving details of zines, reviews, comments, etc. Rosemary Wild, 'Cwm Croesor' Stuckton, Fordingbridge, Hants, England, SP6 2BG.

FEDERATION OUTPOST - the new STAG zine. Make cheques payable to STAG. Sylvia Billings, 49 Southampton Rd, Far Cotton, Northampton, England. Also LOG ENTRIES 38 - 43.

NOCTURNE - a K/S zine from Lee Owers, 23 Maiden Rd, Stratford, London E15 4EZ, England. This zine contains explicit same-sex scenes - please do not order if you object to the premise. An age statement (over 18) required.

ORBIT - a genzine from Doreen DaBinett, 8 De Quincy Close, Brackley, Northants, England. Also some K/S zines which will not knowingly be sold to anyone under 18.

TASMEEN - Simone Mason, Seranis, Danehill, Haywards Heath, Sussex, England. Also LOGICAL THING TO DO, OF DARKNESS AND LIGHT, PRICE OF FRIENDSHIP, and others.

ZENITH - a genzine from Sue Meek, 314 Coach Rd. Est, Washington, Tyne & Wear, England, or Tina Pole, 11F Prior's Tce, Tynemouth, Tyne & Wear, England. Also TICKLED PINK, storied in a lighter vein by Tina Pole.

Scotpress has many zines for sale, including VARIATIONS ON A THEME, ENTERPRISE INCIDENTS, WINE OF CALVORO, WHEEL OF FATE, BAILLIE COLLECTED, WITH HOOPS OF STEEL, THE TRIBE OF JEN-WAE, FULL CIRCLE, WEAVER OF DREAMS and others. SAE for list to Sheila Clark, 6 Craigmill Cottages, Starthmartine, by Dundee, Scotland.

Please send SAE or addressed envelope and 2 IRCs when writing for information on prices and availability of zines.
